

WHAT HAPPENED?

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AND
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WHAT HAPPENED?

This is the first issue of CineAction to be published in the twenty-first century. Consequently, I felt that a fitting theme would be a reflection on the state of film-making at the end of the twentieth century. The title for the issue, "What Happened?", was inspired initially by the last shot of Larry Clark's 1995 film *Kids*, in which one of the lead characters, an amoral quasi-psychopathic skater-type called Casper, looks directly at the camera/audience and asks that precise question. As a summation to a powerful and disturbing film that documented the sexual and social behaviour of young adolescents in New York city, the question "What Happened?" brings the audience directly into contact with the filmic characters, implicating them (as both judges and observers) in the events that they had been watching for the past 90 minutes, serving as a kind of "wake-up call" to parents, other adults and to adolescents themselves.

My intention for this issue of CineAction was to embark on a similar quest, perhaps not so much as a wake-up call but in a more mellow vein, to consider the direction that the cinema had taken over the past decade or so with regards to an assessment of the major trends that have come to dominate the industry, and a side glance at the state of national cinemas in the wake of the American juggernaut. Only one of the papers in this issue deals with a single film: David Anshen's Marxist-inflected piece on class analysis in *The Titanic*, perhaps the most significant film in the last decade with regards to the intermingling of genres—special effects disaster film with a coming-of-age woman's film—and its unprecedented box office popularity despite critical rejection. Jamie Clarke's paper, "Space invaders" looks at the inherent contradictions within a number of recent science fiction films such as *The Matrix* which purport to be about auto-emancipation but which he argues are inextricably caught up and embedded within the matrix of speculative capitalism. Diane Weiner looks at some trends in certain recent science fiction films that she



Kids

calls "invasion narratives", in which women are perceived as secondary to their male counterparts, no matter the purported intention of equality. Geoff King examines the late twentieth century phenomenon of the convergence of films and theme-parks, where rides are based on films, and actual films are constructed as if they were rides. Graeme Harper takes a different path altogether and analyses the impact of what he calls the "film avid" generation on film-making today. The state of film programming is the subject of Stephen Brophy's interview with George Mansour, a Boston area programmer for the last 40 years. And I am pleased to include 2 papers which survey national cinemas: David Gerstner and Sarah Greenlees' extensive research into the history of filmmaking in New Zealand; and Carole Zucker and Kristian Moen's comprehensive analysis of recent Irish films screened at the 1999 Montreal Film Festival.

As is CineAction's custom, this being the first issue following the 1999 Toronto International Film festival, there is a section on reviews of films screened as well as an interview with one of the directors present, Bruno Dumont.

I would like to add a note of thanks to my colleague Flemming Kress whose expertise in the more obscure practices of Internet file translation prevented a number of meltdowns on my part.

Susan Morrison

Ride-Films and Films as Rides

in the Contemporary Hollywood Cinema of Attractions

by Geoff King

If cinema started as a fairground or arcade attraction in the late 19th century, it has become common currency to suggest that it has returned to something close to that status today. Hollywood blockbusters are commonly described by both critics and publicists as "thrill rides" or "rollercoasters". Some commentators have implied that the period of dominance of "classical" narrative structure has come to an end, shown to be merely an interlude between the carnival-style attraction of early cinema and its contemporary equivalent. Narrative concerns are said, more or less explicitly, to have been surrendered to an emphasis on purely visceral thrills. This paper will question some of these assumptions, starting with an analysis of what might be expected to be the most extreme end of the continuum between narrative and spectacular attraction: not just the metaphor of "film as ride", but actual film-based rides or experiences at theme parks such as Disneyland and Universal Studios.

Attractions such as *Terminator 2: 3D*, *Jurassic Park: The Ride* and *Back to the Future: The Ride* (all at Universal) are in many respects contemporary equivalents of the early "cinema of attractions" described in Tom Gunning's influential accounts: a blend of the fairground ride and forms of cinema that seek to engage directly with the viewer.¹





Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom, 1984



Terminator 2: Judgement Day, 1991

The appeal of these attractions is based on confrontation and direct stimulation of the rider/viewer rather than seeking to absorb the audience into sustained narratives. The rider/viewer is subjected to a series of physical and emotional shocks of the kind described by Sergei Eisenstein, on whose work Gunning draws.² Eisenstein's prescription for a cinema that works as an aggressive assault on the audience is realized literally, if shorn of his ideological intention to wake the audience into an active engagement that can bring to the surface the contradictions of capitalism. *Back to the Future: The Ride* and Disneyland's *Star Tours* are based on motion-simulator platforms that buck and yaw alarmingly to synchronize quite effectively with the apparent movements suggested on screen. *Star Tours*, one of the first of these kinds of attractions, projects images onto a relatively small screen that stands for the window of a spacecraft on a runaway flight through various scenes of the film; *Back to the Future* offers more encompassing imagery projected onto a seven-story high Omnimax dome, a chase through time and space that includes plunging into a volcano and down the throat of a T-Rex.

Another version of the film-based theme park attraction offers something that appears closer to a conventional cinematic experience. *Terminator 2: 3D* and Disney's *Honey, I Shrunk the Audience* are 3D films staged in large theatrical auditoria. Various objects are propelled into the audience, in typical 3D style: a selection of weapons and fragments of exploding objects in *T2:3D*, in addition to the probing limbs of the T-1000 terminator from *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* (1991) and its hyperbolic extension in the multi-limbed T-1000,000 invented for the theme park event; a similar repertoire is offered in *Honey, I Shrunk the Audience*. This is nothing new in the history of 3D movies, which have always tended to spend much of their time thrusting objects out at the audience, but these attractions go further in offering a direct impact on the viewer. Both resort to one way of touching the audience physically, without any threat of injury, by spraying liquid in their faces: in *Honey, I Shrunk the Audience*, the result is a climactic gross-out effect as a giant dog sneezes into the auditorium; in *T2:3D* the T-1000,000 is frozen solid and then shattered outwards into a shower of liquid metal fragments.

Physical movement is also used in these two attractions, although the larger theatrical context reduces its scale and impact. In *T2:3D*, the seat of the viewer pushes upwards at the start of the final sequence, in which the screen widens to almost 180 degrees and the audience is given the illusion of joining the fictional protagonists in a descending lift; in the final conflagration, as 3D flames explode out from the screen and smoke effects engulf the theatre, the seat drops back abruptly to jolt the view-

er with the impact of destruction. More sustained motion effects are used in *Honey, I Shrunk the Audience*. Once the audience has been "shrunk", the images on screen are blown up to giant proportions and the booming sounds of the movements of gigantic fictional performers are translated into the shaking of the entire ground of the theatre, an effect that is repeated as the mischievous younger child of the inventor "picks up" the auditorium, which seems to sway beneath the audience as it is carried and nearly dropped. Other Hollywood-based attractions, including *Jurassic Park: The Ride* and *The Indiana Jones Adventure* take the form of more conventional theme-park rides, moving around tracks that purport to take the rider through the landscapes of the relevant films and offering physical assaults such as the tight turns and dips of *Indiana Jones* and the 84-foot rollercoaster splashdown that ends the ride based on *Jurassic Park* (1993).

The contemporary theme-park "cinema of attractions" uses other conventions which contribute to the creation of a relationship between viewer and text reminiscent of the terms in which Gunning's approaches early cinema. The participant/viewer is often directly addressed and interpellated. In *Back to the Future: The Ride* visitors are addressed on video monitors by the figure of Doc Brown/Christopher Lloyd from the films and cast as volunteers in his time travel experiments. *T2:3D* and *Honey, I Shrunk the Audience* present the viewer as part of an audience at, respectively, a demonstration of high-tech weapons and a scientific awards ceremony. This is in part a way of attempting to naturalize some of the process and surroundings of the attractions, including in both of the latter cases the wearing of 3D glasses styled as "safety glasses" needed in the "unlikely" event of anything going wrong. The video presentation used in the warm-up for *007: Licence to Thrill*, a James Bond attraction at the Trocadero centre in London, even informs would-be recruits that the secret research installation they are visiting has been "disguised" as a theme park ride. The modern movie-based theme park attraction has a location similar to that of the first film showings, which often took place as novelties at fairs and amusements parks. There is also a striking resemblance to early attempts to create motion simulation illusions coupled with cinematic images, including the Hale's Tours feature of the 1900s, which synchronized moving platforms disguised as railway carriages with pro-

1 "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, its Spectator and the Avant-Garde", in Thomas Elsaesser, ed. *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative* (London: BFI, 1990); "An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)Credulous Spectator", in Linda Williams, ed. *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995).

2 "The Montage of Film Attractions" in R. Taylor, ed. *Selected Writings, Volume I* (London: BFI, 1987).

jected images designed to create the illusion of the passing landscape.³ The *Back to the Future* ride could be seen as the belated fulfillment of an 1895 design by H.G. Wells and the early inventor and filmmaker Robert Paul for an attraction based on the novelist's *The Time Machine*, a theatre in which the audience would view films and slides from seats on a motion platform, the impression of movement to be increased by blowing air at the viewer.⁴ More recent rounds of novelty attraction within the cinema also come to mind, of course, including the various 1950s experiments with larger screens, 3D (briefly revived in the 1980s) and novelty productions such as William Castle's *The Tingler* (1959), which was shown in some theatres with seats wired to produce mild electric shocks in the audience.

It is no accident that a rollercoaster ride featured centrally in the first Cinerama feature, *This is Cinerama* (1952), nor that one of the first films to use the Sensurround process was *Rollercoaster* (1977). Both use first-person perspectives to give the viewer a sense of being carried on the ride itself. The contemporary ride-film, or film-based ride, is taken by some commentators as an index of the state of contemporary Hollywood. The identification of parallels with aspects of early cinema and subsequent gimmick attractions has tended to encourage the association of the "ride film" with the dominance today of a type of big screen spectacle said to offer the experience of a "ride" largely unadulterated by narrative. Martin Barker and Kate Brooks suggest that for audiences of action films "narrative is like a carrier-wave, similar to the role that rails play on a big dipper – necessary to carry you along, but in themselves not the point of the exercise."⁵ One of the central pleasures of action films identified by those interviewed by Barker and Brooks is what they describe as "the joys of being 'done to' by a film", "a wish to be physically affected by them", knocked out of their seats or hit between the eyes⁶: very much the kind of appeal offered by the theme-park attraction. In some accounts comparisons are extended to suggest similarities between what are perceived as moments of the "birth" and "death" of cinema, at least in its classical form, a tendency exacerbated by the passing of both the "century of cinema" in 1996 and the millennium. The "cinema of attractions" pre-dates the establishment and consolidation of a cinema in which narrative was a principal concern; like Hale's Tours, it marks a stage of development in which what we now recognize as the institution of "cinema" was still finding its shape. The novelty attractions of the 1950s or today are often described in terms of a crisis of cinema or its threatened end-point. In the 1950s novelty experiments were a response to serious economic difficulties. Today the industry is far more healthy but seen as facing challenges in the form of the technological developments of the digital age, including its potential future replacement by more immersive or interactive forms of entertainment.⁷

Miriam Hansen suggests a number of parallels between early and contemporary cinema, each of which is characterized by "a measure of instability that makes the intervening decades look relatively stable, by contrast, for they are anchored in and centred by the classical system."⁸ Classical Hollywood is bracketed, Hansen suggests, by "forms of spectatorship [that] give the viewer a greater leeway, for better or for worse, in interacting with the film – a greater awareness of exhibition and cultural intertexts."⁹ Early cinema left a good deal of the work of meaning-creation to the exhibitor and the viewer, a process mirrored to some extent by the element of viewer control provided by media such as videotape and DVD. Early cinema lacked a stable home of its own, moving around between venues such as vaudeville and travelling shows. If the "classical" form established itself in the exhibition context of the dedicated cinema theatre, this has lost

its primary position to video and the various forms of television.¹⁰ It might follow – although this is not a point made explicitly by Hansen – that the cinema of attractions, too, has made its comeback, displacing the centrality of narrative. Film-based attractions share some of the features of early cinema identified by Hansen. The viewer/rider is likely to be highly aware of the exhibition context and cultural intertexts and is expected to interact noisily with the attractions: much of the appeal lies in sharing the experience, and reactions, with friends. Rides also lack an exclusive home of their own; they are associated primarily with theme-parks that offer a diversity of attractions, but are also found increasingly at locations such as Las Vegas casinos and other leisure complexes.

Spectacular and visceral thrills are the principal and most immediate stuff of the 1990s attractions, and for some they confirm the worst tendencies identified within the Hollywood blockbuster: the epitome of apparently vacuous rollercoaster experiences. The label "thrill ride" is a term often used approvingly in Hollywood publicity and by some film reviewers in the popular press, presumably because a thrill ride is precisely what many viewers want from this kind of cinema. But it has become the basis of a familiar complaint from more "serious" critics and some academic commentators. For Scott Bukatman, Hollywood has developed "what might be termed the 'theme park movie' – a set of overdesigned, hermetically sealed, totalizing environments masquerading as movies. *Dick Tracy* (1990), *Batman* (1989), and *Jurassic Park* (1993) all could be considered examples of this phenomenon."¹¹ Film-based rides are important, Bukatman argues:

(I)n the 1980s and 1990s, films became rides, which is to say that they became less narrative than they used to be and more spectacular, with their spectacles more compressed one atop another but also more extended, hammering across an entire two-hour-plus film with scarcely any let-up. Meanwhile, theme park rides and attractions became more narrative than, say, roller coasters had been. They also were extended. Waiting on line for Star Tours was part of the ride, as elaborate sets and amusing droids entertained but also grounded the spectacle.

Bukatman's account is full of rather sweeping claims about contemporary Hollywood blockbusters, an argument I take up at length elsewhere.¹² The suggestion that any of examples he cites merely "masquerade" as movies is purely hyperbolic, whatever their merits or shortcomings. Films such as *Armageddon* (1998) and *Deep Blue Sea* (1999), to name two more recent examples, offer a pounding and seemingly unremitting spectacular assault,

3 Raymond Fielding, "Hale's Tours: Ultrarealism in the Pre-1910 Motion Picture, in John Fell, ed. *Film Before Griffith* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

4 Fielding, "Hale's Tours", and Brooks Landon, *The Aesthetics of Ambivalence* (Westport and London: Greenwood Press, 1992), xv.

5 *Knowing Audiences: Judge Dredd: Its Friends, Fans and Foes* (Luton: University of Luton Press, 1998), 149-50.

6 *Knowing Audiences*, 146.

7 See, for example, Landon, *The Aesthetics of Ambivalence*.

8 "Early Cinema, Late Cinema: Transformations of the Public Sphere", in Williams, ed. *Viewing Positions*, 149.

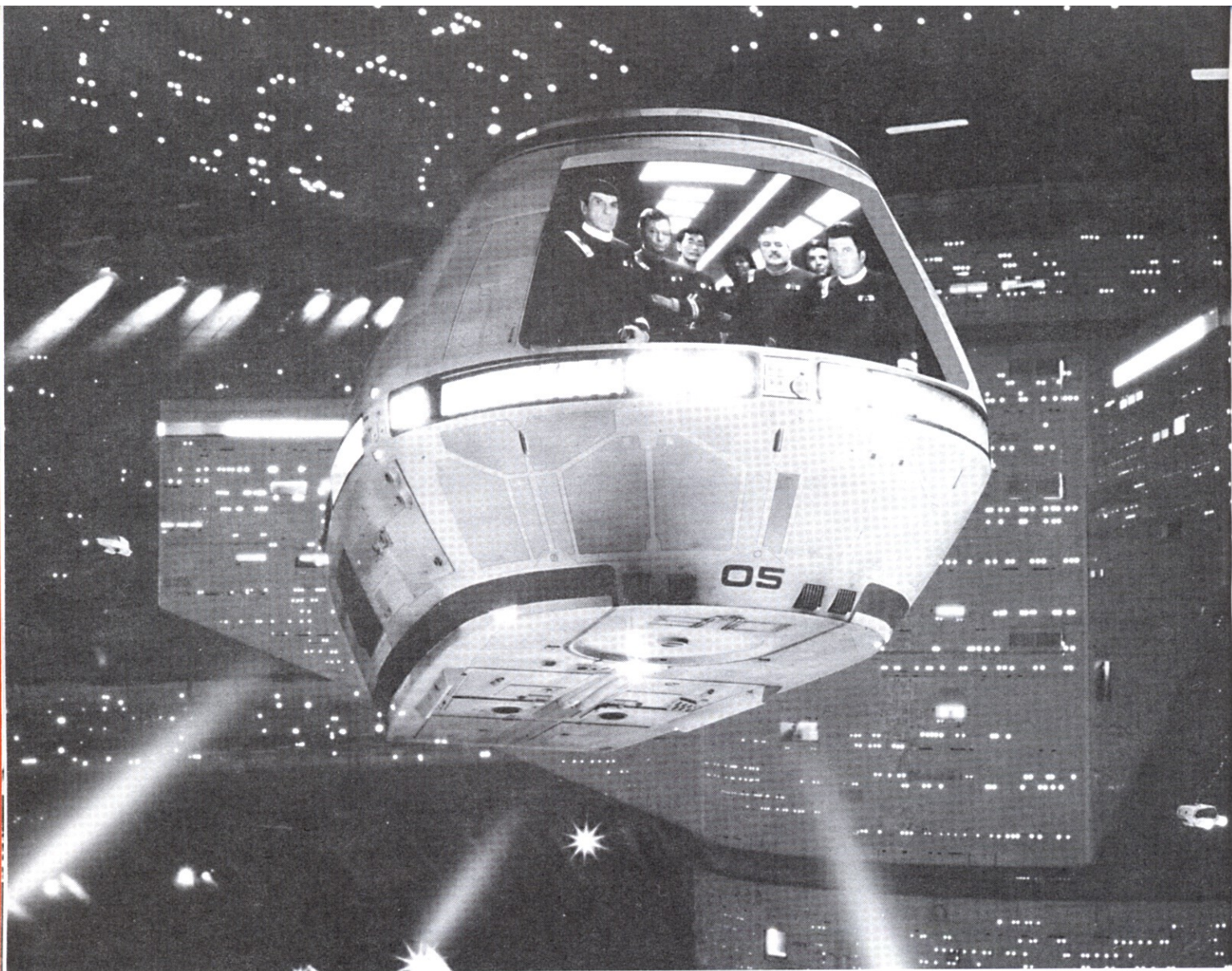
9 "Early Cinema, Late Cinema", 149.

10 Most acts of film viewing now occur on the television screen, through various delivery channels. Video and television sales generally account for a much larger proportion of earnings than theatrical release, although the latter remains important as a showcase that establishes which films are most likely to be high earners in other media.

11 "Zooming Out: The End of Offscreen Space", in Jon Lewis, ed. *The New American Cinema* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998), 266.

12 Most of this paper is extracted from a book, *Spectacular Narratives* (London: I.B.Tauris), forthcoming.





Star Trek

but they do not as a result lack significant narrative dimensions. They might not obey the demands of "classical" narrative structure, but it is questionable how many Hollywood films ever really did.¹³ His latter point is a significant one, however, opening up the possibility of a rather different way of looking at the relationship between attraction-rides and films. The kinds of films Bukatman and others have in mind do not surrender all investment in narrative – in terms of either story-plotting or underlying thematic structures – in the pursuit of ever grander spectacles. Neither, actually, do the theme park attractions or rides. Attenuated though they may be, rarely lasting more than about 10 minutes, they have their own narrative components. Elements of narrative are, indeed, structured into the inevitable process of waiting on line or in the wings involved in the experience of such popular attractions. *Star Tours*, as Bukatman suggests, provides a theatrical backdrop to entertain the waiting queue, and this has become a standard feature of these attractions. Video monitors, posters and other media are used as "warm up" devices, to keep audiences amused during the wait and to prepare them to get the most from the spectacle that follows.¹⁴ The lengthy preamble/queue for *The Indiana Jones Adventure* at Disneyland, for example, takes the visitor through a

series of mock temple chambers and passageways that set the mood for the ride itself. An element of interactivity is introduced, including notices and warnings to read, certain marked paved stones on which the visitor is told to avoid standing, and a mock period newsreel film about the main attraction itself. *T2:3D* and *Honey, I Shrunk the Audience* bring waiting visitors into a vestibule area before the main event, in which they are entertained and prepared through a combination of video-monitor presentations and live hosts. The physical organization of the queue itself has become something of an art form, especially for rides that do not have large capacities and generally involve longer waits on line. The lines for *Star Tours*, *The Indiana Jones Adventure* and *Back to the Future: The Ride* are cunningly designed to snake and turn through different chambers in such a way as to remove the appearance of a single long queue. Something akin to a kind of narrative manipulation of expectation is constructed as the audience moves closer to the end of one section, a miniature crisis of expectation, fulfillment and often disappointment created as visitors wait to find out if they are "really" at the end of the line, at last, as they pass from one chamber to the next. It is possible to see the overall experience of the ride-film as in one sense similar to that of the "classical" narrative pattern: a lengthy and gradual build-up lead-

ing to a relatively brief and spectacular climax.

If this seems to be stretching the point a little, it is worth noting that the ride-film or attraction usually has a story-narrative of its own in a more obvious sense. The viewer/experiencer is not plunged into a direct and unmediated experience of three-dimensional spectacle. So, in *Back to the Future: The Ride* visitors are briefed on a specific mission based on a plot thread from the films: their task, as time travel volunteers in Doc Brown's Institute of Future Technology, is to chase and bring back to the present the rogue Biff Tannen/Thomas F. Wilson, who has escaped with one the scientist's time-travelling DeLoreans, before he does irreparable damage to the space-time continuum. *T2:3D* presents, in microcosm, what is effectively another Terminator sequel, a tale in which the threat to humanity forestalled in *Terminator 2* has been renewed and has heroically to be tackled once again. *Honey, I Shrunk the Audience* is structured in much the same way, as a truncated sequel in which another permutation is worked in the game of comic crisis engendered by shrinking and/or enlargement. These attractions can also be understood in terms of the underlying narrative oppositions and issues found in their feature-length parents. A common feature is a discourse about the relationship between technology and humanity, a prominent narrative theme of the science fiction genre from which many of these attractions are drawn.

T2:3D sets up an opposition between utopian and dystopian visions of advanced technology that is found widely in Hollywood cinema, science fiction and otherwise. Information supplied during the queuing process plays heavily on the utopian side of the equation. Promotional material from the Cyberdyne corporation promises: "Making you a better person through technology." A range of wonderful new technologies is unveiled, including virtual doctors and operating theatres and the original prototype T-1 malleable metallic material that can be reshaped to function as both knife and fork, or anything else we desire. Familiarity with the franchise and a general underlying sinister tone lead us to distrust blandishments such as the sight of a mother able to tuck up her child at night, virtually, even when she is away from home, through the interface of a pair of robot arms. The official PR video signal is interrupted as the drama begins, while the visitor is still in the vestibule, when actors playing the characters John and Sarah Connor break in with a rebel message about the threat posed to humanity by the corporation and its new generation of computer technologies. Many of these theme park attractions are organized around the theme of the promises, threats and unpredictable hazards offered by new technologies. *Honey, I Shrunk the Audience* is a catalogue of errors and eccentricity, just like the films from which it was spawned. Like the feature films, it is implicated in an ideological presentation of technology: technology associated with innocent eccentricity and family values, rather than the product of giant corporations like the evil Cyberdyne; this despite the fact that the shrinking machine invented by Wayne Szalinski/Rick Moranis resembles nothing more closely than a sinister laser weapon of the kind unleashed against humanity in the Terminator series. The imaginary technology of *Back to the Future: The Ride* is a mixed blessing, as in the films, often going wrong or being threatened with dangerous misuse. It, too, is presented as the product of loveable eccentricity rather than the might of corporate or military R&D. A similar impression is created in *007: Licence to Thrill*, and the rest of the Bond franchise, in which technological gadgetry is located within a powerful state agency yet clothed in the garb of eccentricity through the characterization of the section head Q/Desmond Llewellyn.

Star Tours and *Jurassic Park: The Ride* offer the spectacle of tech-

nology gone, literally, off the rails. In *Star Tours* a gentle trip to the moon of Endor turns into a hectic ride when the inexperienced robot pilot misses a turning before launch, crashes around inside a space station and sets off on a haphazard journey through a series of zones from which it should have been forbidden. *Jurassic Park: The Ride* starts with a relatively bland boat trip through the dinosaur park, the visitor having been given repeated assurances on video while waiting in line that Jurassic Park is safe, well guarded and protected by technology. The ride then stages an illusion of "going the wrong" way, as the boat appears to miss the prescribed route and enter a forbidden "backstage" area rife with dangers from escaped velociraptors, a T-Rex that looms down from above, poisoned atmosphere and the climactic plunge. It is in the act of going "off the rails", the wrong way, or witnessing the interruption of what are initially presented as routine procedures, that the thrilling aspects of these attractions are usually comprised. This again suggests continuity with the structure of contemporary Hollywood itself. What we are given to inhabit in many of these attractions is akin to the position of the conventional Hollywood hero, experiencing the thrills that are found on a wild or rebellious "frontier" style domain that is juxtaposed to all that is corporate, controlled or immersed in technology. Technology is portrayed as a potential threat unless its impact is mitigated by the assertion of "human" qualities that serve, more often than not, to naturalize particular social structures and relationships. In *Jurassic Park*, for example, undue reliance on technology proves dangerous but the failure of technology also creates the opening that enables the central character Grant/Sam Neill, who dislikes children, to be reconstructed as a father-figure.¹⁵

There is a strong connection between these theme park attractions and the films they exploit, in other words, but it is not one that is best described in terms of an eclipse of narrative concerns at either extreme. Thomas Schatz, in an influential essay on New Hollywood, argues that the blockbuster tends to be "purposefully incoherent" at the narrative level specifically because it is designed to provide franchises that can be exploited in other media such as theme-park rides. Coherent narrative is less important, according to this argument, than the ability to extract various elements from the film. The nature of the films themselves is changed by the way they are used as the launchpad for a series of other manifestations. Schatz attributes this development to the contemporary industrial landscape in which the vertical integration of classical Hollywood "has given way to 'horizontal integration' of the New Hollywood's tightly diversified media conglomerates, which favours texts strategically 'open' to multiple readings and multimedia reiteration."¹⁶ There is much to agree with in this account except that it overstates the extent to which narrative was "coherent" in the past or is "incoherent" today. Films made in the studio era "had their intertextual qualities", Schatz concedes, but "these were incidental and rarely undermined the internal coherence of the narrative itself." Does this really go far enough, to account for the potent intertextual dimension of phenomena such as genre and star performance in the heyday of classical Hollywood? I would suggest not. The con-

13 See Rick Altman, "Dickens, Griffith, and Film Theory Today", in Jane Gaines, *Classical Hollywood Narrative: The Paradigm Wars* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1992).

14 For a description of the construction of a motion-based ride-film, including the design of the "preshow", although not one based on a feature film, see Mario Kamberg, "Seafari: An Expedition into Motion Base Ride Filmmaking", in Clark Dodsworth, ed. *Digital Illusions: Entertaining the Future with High Technology* (New York: ACM Press, 1998).

15 This theme is one that I explore in greater detail in *Spectacular Narratives*.

16 "The New Hollywood", in Jim Collins, Hilary Radner and Ava Preacher Collins, eds. *Film Theory Goes to the Movies* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 34.

temporary blockbuster is open to a degree of multiple readings in pursuit of a wide-ranging audience; and it is certainly "open" to multimedia reiteration. The question is whether these qualities add up to a qualitative difference at the level of narrative: the situation might be a good deal less clear-cut.

Attractions are built around and extend the spectacular potential of blockbuster films. But they also play on narrative resonances, a point made by Murray Smith in relation to *Jurassic Park* and its sequel *The Lost World* (1997), the kind of films that are regularly cited in this debate: "The dinosaurs in Spielberg's recent films are not just impressive spectacles, but creatures of terror and wonderment – characters, antagonists, in a tale. It is this emotional dimension which, among other things, makes the movies memorable, and thus fosters the "memorialization" of the experience through further purchases – be it games, videos, clothing or theme parks."¹⁷ The demands of the blockbuster may have led to an emphasis on certain genres and on episodic forms of narrative, but this is not the same as narrative being displaced. The movie "provides a primary narrative baseline which both endows isolated movie icons with meaning and emotional resonance, and provides a backdrop against which to toy with these associations in other media contexts." This is a useful and subtle account of the relationships between the different manifestations of popular media products. The meanings and resonances carried by film icons are important commercial considerations, helping to ensure that expensive theme park attractions have a ready-made audience and are able instantly to establish clear and positive associations in the minds of potential visitors. The more intense experience of aspects of the spectacle offered by the films is a major factor in their appeal, but this can be heightened by carrying over narrative associations and identifications from the films and by including elements of narrative within even the most visceral thrill-based attraction. As Janet Murray suggests: "the movie-rides are providing evidence that audiences are not satisfied by intense sensation alone. Once people do go 'into' the movie, they want more than a roller-coaster ride; they want a story."¹⁸

The stories on which both rides and films draw usually play on dominant ideological assumptions, not because of any conspiratorial intent but because they provide convenient ground upon which to launch spectacular attraction. Barker and Brooks found among their respondents what they describe as "a virtual disinterest in the plot of films. These could be digested, and spat out, in a single phrase: 'just the usual. Goody wins, Baddy dies.'"¹⁹ Narrative content could effectively be discounted, it seems, an attitude that appears to confirm the conception of narrative as just a "carrier-wave" for action-spectacle. From the perspective of an ideological analysis, however, that which is discounted or almost invisible on the grounds of its routine familiarity is precisely the material that needs to be interrogated. This is very often the stuff of dominant ideological formulations, familiar "commonsense" understandings that in fact construct very particular understandings of the world (with particular social and political implications) but that have become sedimented into the level of "taken for granted" everyday assumptions, the conceptual air that we breathe. Nothing, perhaps, is more deserving of investigation than that which is taken to be merely "obvious".

Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom (1984) is another film that at one point literalizes Barker and Brooks' image of narrative as performing a role like that of the rails on a fairground ride. A five minute chase sequence takes place on the underground railway system of a mining complex, the tracks carrying the main protagonists through a rollercoaster series of thrills and spills. This is a good example in microcosm of the kind of blockbuster

cinema in which a relentless series of big set-pieces often appears to move mechanically from one high point to another, overriding any serious narrative interest. The film is bristling with fairly explicit themes, however, generally of a decidedly racist and sexist tenor. When the concern is to shape narratives as "carrier waves" to move viewers effortlessly from one action spectacular to another, it is the most conventional and familiar cultural frameworks that are usually pressed into service, precisely because their currency renders them relatively invisible. A set of narrative themes organized to provide a strong challenge to racism or sexism would be more likely to be perceived as trying to impose a "message" on the audience. The imposition of such "messages" is anathema to the respondents of Barker and Brooks. They express this not in relation to any challenge that might be made to their own assumptions about the world, but purely in terms of the harm the imposition of a "message" might do to the seemingly otherwise undiluted experience of the spectacle. That which is a familiar part of the institutionalized and taken-for-granted cultural reality we inhabit is far less likely to be experienced as a "message", and therefore serves better as a "carrier-wave" for the action. This, rather than any more active participation in a "backlash" against the limited gains of anti-racism and anti-sexism, might be one of the main reasons for the generally reactionary nature of the narrative stuff of so many contemporary Hollywood features. The fact that familiar taken-for-granted meanings are to be found within films or rides enables members of the audience to pay them little attention; they constitute a familiar and comfortable ground from which to enjoy the action. Discourses based on dominant ideologies tend to render the world in reassuring and recognizable form. As Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean Narboni put it their classic Althusserian editorial from the French journal *Cahiers du Cinema*: "when we set out to make a film, from the very first shot, we are encumbered by the necessity of reproducing things not as they really are but as they appear when refracted through the ideology."²⁰ This is not the result of some devious political manipulation but an appeal to the already-familiar that is explicable in commercial terms.

One interpretation would see the contemporary theme-park attraction as the equivalent of the early "cinema of attractions" in the sense that each moves towards the inclusion of an increasingly important narrative dimension. The standard account has the cinema of attractions gradually giving way to an ever-greater attention to narrative complexity and continuity. The theme park ride might also be expected to develop or be followed by other formats that offer more sustained narrative structure. Some prophesy the advent of a brand of cinema that incorporates features such as motion platforms or other illusions of immersion in the diegetic space: "the cinema of the future will be a modified flight simulator."²¹ This might happen, but there are plenty of economic reasons why it might not, at least in the foreseeable future. Hollywood seems unlikely to invest the vast sums required while the major studios are doing very nicely from the current format, a lesson taught by most instances of technological change or continuity.²² Conversely, numerous commentators have predicted the development of virtual reality entertainments that will be even less dependent on narrative than the conventional view of the film ride. For Bukatman: "The body in virtual reality transcends the need for a surrogate character to experience the diegesis for him or her, or for a narrative to ground the exploration of an unfamiliar space. Instead, an illusion of direct, immediate (and seemingly *nonmediated*) engagement is produced, while spatial exploration is at last acknowledged as an experiential end in itself."²³ There may be no need for a surrogate character or narrative in new forms of virtual reality entertain-

ment, but that is far from suggesting that they will not be offered. It might be more plausible to suggest that virtual reality entertainments are likely to stick to some kind of mixture of narrative and directly immersive "ride" experiences. Direct immersion tends to be uncomfortable and/or demanding if extended beyond a brief period. The classical Hollywood *decoupage*, still very much in evidence in today's blockbusters, avoids this problem by offering combinations of perspectives located close to those of "surrogate" characters and apparently more "objective" positions. This is exactly how *Rollercoaster* organizes its ride sequences: potentially dizzying first-person images from the front seat of the rides are balanced with "safer" and more stable third-person perspectives. The same goes for the rail chase in *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, in which immediate "rollercoaster" perspectives are offered but account for much less of the sequence than various other viewpoints on the action and the plight of the characters. None of this is a question of the absolute formal requirements of one medium or another, but of the adoption of conventions that have proved successful in one place and been repeated elsewhere.

It is easy to over-simplify the narrative/attraction dynamics involved in any of these products. The original cinema of attractions was far from being an entirely narrative-free zone,²⁴ just as the entire history of "classical" Hollywood has rarely lacked a centrally important element of "attraction", whether in the form of the routines of comedy and the musical or the appeal of mag-

nificent sets, scenery, special effects or star performance. The precise balance shifts historically, for a variety of reasons including the immediate economic situation of the entertainment industry and broader social movements; but a combination of the two is more characteristic than any undiluted instance of one or the other. The contemporary ride-film version of the cinema of attractions is less a "return" to a point of origin than further exemplification of this long-standing tendency.

17 "Theses on the Philosophy of Hollywood History", in Steve Neale and Murray Smith, eds. *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 14.

18 *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997), 50.

19 *Knowing Audiences*, 53.

20 "Cinema/Ideology/Criticism", reprinted in Bill Nichols, ed. *Movies and Methods*, Volume 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 25.

21 Conrad Schoeffter, "Scanning the Horizon: A Film is a Film is a Film", in Thomas Elsaesser and Kate Hoffman, ed., *Cinema Futures: Cain, Abel or Cable?* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1998), 115.

22 For numerous examples, see Brian Winston, *Technologies of Seeing: Photography, Cinematography and Television* (London: BFI, 1996).

23 *Terminal Identity*, 239-40.

24 See, for example, Andre Gaudreault, "Film, Narrative, Narration: The Cinema of the Lumière Brothers", in Thomas Elsaesser, *Early Cinema*.

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Space Invaders

Speculations on the politics of post-modern space in recent science fiction films

by Jamie Clarke

The year is 2003, and what sociologists call the Americanisation of the globe has spread to the European telecommunications sector... A relentless tide of US know-how and money has washed into a Europe still struggling to wake up to the opportunities of deregulation... It is only a scenario but it is a likely one...The US telecoms firms are over-financed and over here. (17/10/99)¹

"What good is a phone call if you're unable to speak?" Agent Smith to Thomas Anderson in *The Matrix* (1999).

In a central scene of the recent science fiction film *The Matrix* (1999) Thomas Anderson/Keanu Reeves is immediately neutralised and apprehended when the ultimate yuppie nightmare occurs and he drops his mobile phone. As the phone leaves Anderson's hand it is photographed in slow motion and bathed in a light which accentuates its sleek surface and dark aesthetics. The phone is energised with motion as it flips and tumbles in keeping with Marx's analysis of the commodity form. The camera lingers on the brand name, "Nokia", which is emblazoned on the side of the hardware.² I contend that this moment exemplifies a dominant motif in millennial film whereby economic, technological and cultural levels are imbricated into a cohesive system. I will argue that this consolidation of the levels is effected at this precise millennial moment for determined historical reasons, most notably the corporate expansionism of the 1980s and 1990s, and that this synergy demands a re-evaluation of the relationship between the spectator and the "film industry".

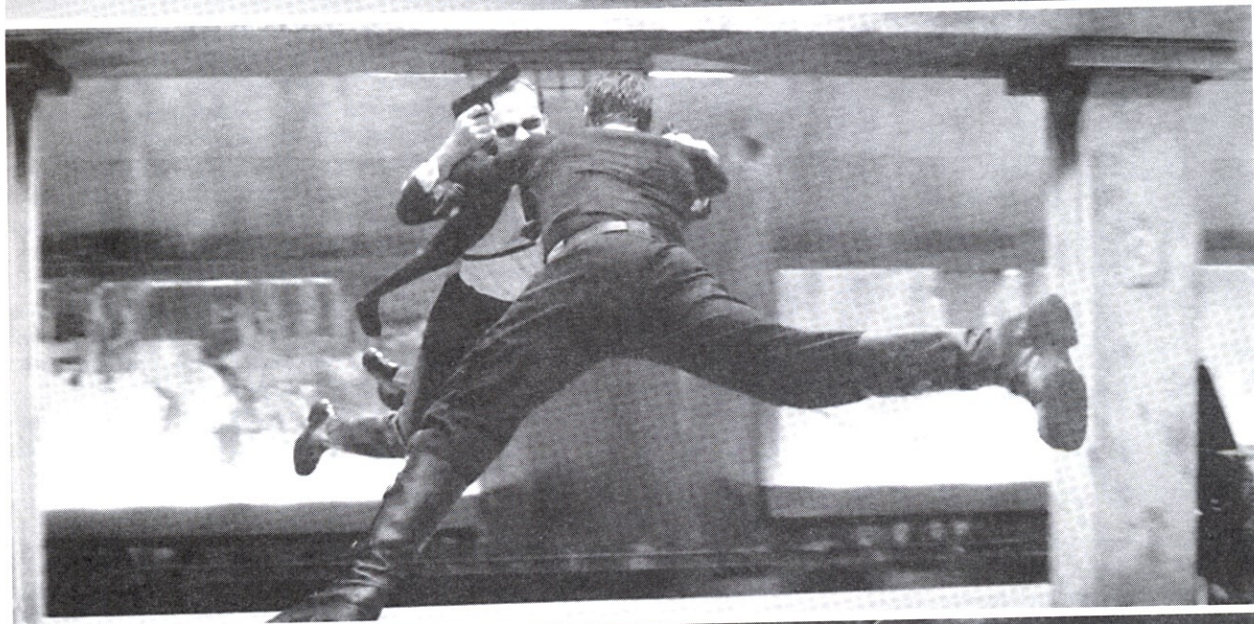
In *Postmodernism; or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Fredric Jameson determines that any periodisation, such as that undertaken by an analysis of millennial film, must necessarily traffic with precisely these various levels of semi-autonomous experience. The economic, the technological and the cultural levels intertwine and a historical moment is determined by the historical subject's mediation with, and between these levels. As

1. 'It's Uncle Sam on the Line For Europe', *The Observer*, Business Section- 17/10/99, p.4.

2. The history of telephones in films is dynamic in registering various transitions in global relations. See *His Girl Friday* (1940) where the emergence of the telephone catalyses America's integration with Europe in World War Two. See too all the telephone calls in *All the President's Men* (1976) which illustrate how Watergate was a crime perpetrated and also discovered by the media for media purposes. More recently see *Clueless* (1995) where the mobile phone is compared explicitly with the monolith in *2001- A Space Odyssey* (1969) which ushers in the next stage of technology inspired evolution.



The Matrix, 1999



The Matrix, 1999



Jameson writes, analysis of a period ought to reflect:

That Althusserian 'structure in dominance' in which the various levels entertain a semi-autonomy over and against each other, run at different rates of speed, develop unevenly, and yet conspire to produce a totality.³

As an historical materialist Jameson affords determining primacy to the economic level. David Bordwell and Janet Staiger contradict this emphatically in their seminal but conservative *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*. They invert Jameson's grid by maintaining that "in the last analysis, stylistic factors can explain the most specific and interesting aspects of Hollywood filmmaking."⁴ I side with Jameson on this score, maintaining that economic considerations determine style and that any alternative formulation severely risks excluding an historical framework. Yet in the era of multinational, late capitalism it is crucial to stress that this does not eliminate either the technological nor the cultural levels from consideration. As Jameson continues:

What we must now ask ourselves is whether it is not precisely this semi-autonomy of the cultural sphere which has been destroyed by the logic of late capitalism....We must go on to affirm that the dissolution of an autonomous sphere of cul-

ture is rather to be imagined in terms of an explosion... to the point at which everything in our social life — from economic value and state power to practices and to the very structure of the psyche itself — can be said to have become cultural.⁵

It is thus, increasingly difficult to separate the levels which in the millennial period of multinationalist, late capital have never before been so fully integrated. Determining primacy is allocated to the economic consideration but culture is the means by which the subject comes to an understanding of their own relation to the period. Yet the mediation between the levels and the consequent determination of the properly historical millennial subject is best facilitated by the media in all its forms, from television, newspapers, the internet, videogames, to what concerns us here primarily, film. The vertical and horizontal conglomeratisation of the media which was initiated by the film industry in the 1980s now threatens to expand into telecommunications (as envisioned above by the Observer) in line with the expectation and speculation that soon all information will be transmitted via telephone circuits. This corporate expansionism reflects the Americanisation of the three realms of experience and the consequent American conditioning of the millennial subject. It seems now impossible to escape this net of media influence. In light of this monopolisation of the media, how is it possible for the millennial subject to speak outside of this matrix? What good is a phone call if you're unable to speak?

If I am concentrating here on science fiction film, it is because it seems to me that science fiction is supremely outfitted to dramatise this nexus of influence. The impact of technology and special effects together with skyrocketing production costs conspire to condition science fiction as a salient millennial form which knits together the three levels. Furthermore, science fiction necessarily foregrounds the act of periodisation. As Jameson continues:

Science fiction as a genre entertains a dialectical structural relationship with the historical novel—a relationship of kinship and inversion all at once...If the historical novel 'corresponded' to the emergence of historicity, of a sense of history in its strong modern post-eighteenth century sense, science fiction equally corresponds to the waning of the blockage of that historicity...It can first and foremost be defined as a perception of the present as history.⁶

The science fiction genre gestures towards a culture which has forgotten how to think historically. Science fiction is postmodern in this framework in that it merely regurgitates past styles without envisioning any prospect of dramatic socio-political change. The determination of 1999 science fiction as a history of the present distances the spectator from the experience of the present and functions to form a culture which can only imagine a future which is compelled to repeat the past. If it is possible to write a history of the present then this must disable the spectator from any political agency. The sequence of *Star Wars* films which re-enact the same formula but nevertheless continue to be successful seems to confirm this paradigm.⁷ This relates to the significance of the word "speculation" within my title and how the idea of speculation seems especially apposite to the concept of science fiction. Speculation gestures towards the capacity of envisioning in the present what will happen in the future. If science fiction is a history of the present, then this ably dramatises to what extent speculation on the future merely determines that the future, to re-iterate the issue's title, has already therefore, "happened". This concept of speculation therefore, also ties into the idea of specu-

lative finance capital and to the process of conglomeratisation which threatens to annex the future. As Jameson writes in "The Brick and the Balloon":

Time and a new relationship to the future as a space of necessary expectation of revenue and capital accumulation -or, if you prefer, the structural reorganization of time itself into a kind of futures market -this is now the final link in the chain.⁸

Within this paradigm the future is not contingent and will not belong to us as it has already been bought and sold. This further disconnects the spectator from any activist relationship to the future. Finally the concept of speculation brings into relief the notion of *seeing* into the future. In "The End of Offscreen Space", Scott Buckatman writes on science fiction films paying, "inevitable attention to the act of seeing."⁹ Science fiction, with its predilection for special effects, reifies the act of seeing and relates to the final supreme commodity form, the image. Science fiction within this reading is supremely conditioned to agitate various consumer impulses which further restrict the autonomy of the spectator by programming future actions. To summarise then science fiction mobilises a distinct emphasis on the act of seeing whilst in turn suggesting an historical impasse in which the present and the future cannot be altered precisely because they have already happened.

In this paper I attempt to historicise millennial film and the problems entailed in finding a space for the subject within the exponential dynamics of late, multinational capitalism. This will involve an appeal to a return to Marxist and Althusserian/Lacanian readings of film discredited in certain film circles since Richard Maltby's influential book *Harmless Entertainment*. My re-evaluation of the relationship between filmmaker and spectator arrives at an historical (and millennial) moment when Marxist criticism is enjoying a renaissance. David Harvey outlines the reasons for this in his introduction to the new edition of *The Limits of Capital* written in May 1999.¹⁰ Harvey cites the collapse of the Far East economies together with phenomena such as sweat shops and downsizing before listing a number of unlikely critics who have proposed a return to class analysis from Richard Rorty, Judith Butler, and Henry Louis Gates to Jacques Derrida. Following Derrida's *Specters Of Marx*,¹¹ I will suggest that we inherit from Marx no matter how hard we attempt to kill his ghosts. However, this is not to say that a certain adaptation is not necessary in order for Marxism to be a useful tool in analysing millennial film. As Derrida maintains, what is needed is an analysis in the spirit of Marx, if not necessarily a Marxist analysis. In view of this millennial reappraisal of Marxism, I intend to extend this trend into the hitherto resistant area of film studies.

In *Harmless Entertainment* Richard Maltby denigrates the *Cahiers du Cinema* tradition of the Althusserian/Lacanian constitution of the subject by the cinematic apparatus/language. He argues that:

It is not a matter so much of the camera/projector imposing a point of view on the audience as a question of their adopting the camera's perspective. The distinction is between a diktat and a voluntary agreement ...Those who propose that the cinema constitutes its subject are in a sense giving no...credit to the audience's capacity.¹²

Maltby proceeds to adopt a formal analysis which illustrates that cinema is a collective enterprise generating "polyvalent interpretations," before reflecting that "the concept of a dominant ideology fits more easily into a society that consciously operates class



divisions than it does in one which propounds its egalitarianism."¹³ This strikes me as a distinctly problematic formulation and one that becomes outdated in the millennial climate of globalisation/Americanisation which attempts to expound egalitarianism and democratisation just as economic difference becomes more pronounced. In order to understand Maltby's position it is

3. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Verso, 1991), p.xx

4. David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), p.367

5. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism; or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Verso, 1991), p.48.

6. *Ibid.*, p.284

7. It is important here to consider not only *The Phantom Menace*, but also the re-release of the special editions of the first three films and before that the cynical and indeed cyclical marketing ploy of releasing on video the original format for the first time. The second film of the prequel cycle is currently in production.

8. Fredric Jameson, *The Cultural Turn -Selected Writings on the Postmodern* (Verso, 1998), p.185

9. Jon Lewis editor, *The New American Cinema* (Duke University Press, 1998), p.250

10. David Harvey, *The Limits of Capital* (Verso, 1999).

11. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx* (Routledge, 1994) translated by Peggy Kamuf.

12. Richard Maltby, *Harmless Entertainment: Hollywood and the Ideology of Consensus* (The Scarecrow Press inc., 1983), p.19-20

13. *Ibid.*, p.24

necessary to historicise Maltby's historicising. Within this context, Maltby's 1983 de-politicisation of the film industry seems informed by his own periodisation within a prevailing climate of the emergence of the New Right following the economic crises of the 1970s and subsequent de-regulation and Reaganomics. Furthermore, writing in 1983, Maltby is riding the crest of the renaissance in American filmmaking in the seventies which oriented around certain *auteurs*, most notably Coppola, de Palma, Spielberg, and Scorsese.¹⁴ This halcyon era of filmmaking was further informed by the vertical disintegration of the studios monopoly of production, distribution and exhibition effected in the fallout of the Paramount decision of 1948.¹⁵ The success of seventies film is also underscored by the move into a post-Fordist targeted economy facilitated within the film industry by the new classification system of 1968 and the elimination of the Production Code in 1966. This combined to create a more streamlined product which specifically targeted (and some might argue shaped) particular class interests. Maltby writes in the glowing aftermath of this decade when box office receipts were escalating and the films themselves in terms of content satisfied conventional ideas of quality. Yet Maltby seems to some extent to have been insensitive to the emergence of the blockbuster, most notably *Jaws* (1975) and *Star Wars* (1977). These films initiated a culture of tie-in merchandising and can be held to some degree responsible for what is now called the synergy of the media/entertainment industry. As Jon Lewis writes in "Money Matters":

Since the early eighties- a period routinely referred to as 'the corporate era' in Hollywood- increasing de-regulation and a dramatic reinterpretation of anti-trust guidelines, the introduction of junk bond financing and its use in leveraged mergers and acquisitions and the growing consolidation of assets and power by large corporations within the deeply incestuous and collusive industry have dramatically altered the way business is conducted in Hollywood.¹⁶

Media corporate gigantism was kickstarted when the Supreme Court found in favour of Kirk Kerkorian in 1979 against the Justice Department's monopoly case and his precedent has been followed by the likes of CEO Stephen J. Ross¹⁷ and Gerald Levin at what is now Time Warner, alongside Michael Eisner at Disney and Rupert Murdoch at Twentieth Century Fox. This phenomenon has led to the vertical and horizontal re-integration of the media industry so that companies no longer merely control the means of production, distribution and exhibition. The same companies now control ancillary markets in network news television, in merchandising, in theme parks, in publishing, in music and sport. Furthermore, Janet Wasko has indicated towards the integration of hardware manufacturers with the producers of software in the Sony's acquisition of Columbia in 1989.¹⁸ If I am taking time to actually address the films themselves, it is because the films, and by the term "film" I mean the sequence of images which in some places is still projected onto a screen in a darkened room, seem to becoming less and less prominent. Furthermore, the globalisation of this process has resulted in the fact that American-based studios re-coup some 80% of profits from abroad. This has led to the standardisation of narrative in the late eighties and nineties which are capital intensive and easily translatable to foreign markets. In line with *The Observer* extract, the next area to be incorporated into the media industry is widely considered to be the telecommunications and computer industries as a result of technology such as ATM and DSL which converts a telephone line into a supercharged pipeline capable of car-

rying multimedia services. Such is the power of these multinationals that box office revenues are no longer the bread and butter of film production. Expensive flops such as *Waterworld* (1995) and *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* (1994) still make a profit due to VCR, DVD and other related tie-ins. As Scott Buckatman realises:

The rise of effects-centred films, the decline of narrative, the return of the cinema of attraction, the sequels and simulations and spectacles- all of this suggests that what we seem to be witnessing is the end of offscreen space...Real space is increasingly penetrated by filmic realities in the forms of merchandising, web sites, fan conferences and theme parks.¹⁹

This explicitly contradicts Maltby's 1983 formulation whereby "going to the movies is an event marked off from other activities by a sustained set of segregations."²⁰ Recent histories of the film industry written by the likes of Jon Lewis, Janet Wasko, Murray Smith, Douglas Gomery, Tino Balio, and indeed by Maltby himself (although crucially Maltby has refused to amend his 1983 methodology), have emphasised the impact of conglomeratisation and some have compared the effect this has had on film style. Such film histories rigorously analyse precisely which causes determine film style, alternating between Gomery's privileging of great men in "Hollywood Corporate Business Practice and Periodizing Contemporary Film History",²¹ to, say, Wasko's technological frame in *Hollywood in the Information Age*. Yet there has been an overriding resistance to re-define the relationship between the spectator and the filmmaker in light of this rearrangement both of film property and of cinema going habits. I argue that the millennial reconfiguration of film ownership and spectatorship necessitates, in turn, a re-theorisation of the relationship between the spectator and the filmmaker. "Real" experience increasingly passes through the cultural-media matrix as reality is packaged and designed for consumption. I consider that the cumulative effect of this is to break down Maltby's utopian formulation of a "contract"²² between the filmmaker and the spectator. When the filmmakers no longer rely explicitly upon the spectator's dollar so much as on ancillary markets then it no longer appears tenable to speak of contracts or of the audience's commitment being "voluntary."²³ Films increasingly become extended advertisements for consumer activity in these other fields. Maltby's 1998 essay "'Nobody knows everything': post-classical historiographies and consolidated entertainment" indicates towards this phenomenon when citing Steve McBeth, vice president of consumer products for Disney. Commenting on the rubber replica of Flounder from *The Little Mermaid* (1989) in a McDonalds happy meal, McBeth reckons, "it extends the entertainment experience for the child—it's a way of letting the fun of the movie continue."²⁴ Now this seems directly comparable to formulations of the Culture Industry envisioned by Adorno and Horkheimer but discredited by Maltby in 1983. Maltby concludes in 1998 by retreating into an aesthetic principle whereby, "critics may take solace by revisiting classic historiography to contemplate movies omitted or elided from most accounts of Hollywood's past...the industry's prestige product has been excluded from the critical canon."²⁵ Yet it seems to me that criticism should directly engage with these capital intensive products rather than pretending that the cultural-aesthetic realm exists independently of economics. Narrative centrality is directly menaced by this formula. This is an opinion which Maltby's 1998 essay opposes:

This has not greatly diminished the strategic importance of that (film) sector, since the ancillary markets are themselves

dominated by feature films, and the American domestic theatrical market remains crucial in determining the value of a product in subsequent outlets.²⁶

Up until the phenomenon of *The Phantom Menace* (1999), I would have been inclined to agree. Yet how is it possible any longer to agree not to see *The Phantom Menace*? A film which was publicised to such an unprecedented level that it may well be the first film to have made a profit before anyone went to see it.²⁷ To talk of the centrality of the film itself to the film's publicity is to neglect the totalising, multi-media saturation of a pre-sold commodity. It may be argued that *The Phantom Menace* is an exception which inherits a sense of narrative quality from *Star Wars*, yet it is only an exception until the next prequel is released.²⁸

In respect of this, I want here to advocate a return not to Marxist analysis verbatim but to exchange Maltby's utopian 1983 analysis and his dystopian 1998 formulation for a more critical engagement with film as some marketing mutation of ideology. Following the work of Ryan and Kellner in *Camera Politica*,²⁹ and integrating their geopolitical frame with Wasko's technological and Lewis's financial trajectories, I advocate a treatment of film which invokes the ideological shaping of the subject by the multi-media apparatus. This is not to de-historicise the spectator as a transcendent Lacanian/Althusserian subject but rather to admit that at this millennial instant, synergy threatens individual autonomy in a way that would have been inconceivable twenty years ago. As Allen Meek writes following Baudrillard's essay "The Ecstasy of Communication":

The proliferation of televisual technologies- TV, video, computers- has supported through the fetishization of mechanisms of control, a 'fascistic subject'... The subject collapses into screen and network terminal...like the pilot of a privatised tele-vehicle...The increasing mobility of audio-visual technology makes the entire world a potential screen.³⁰

This endorses Jameson's opinion that the psyche itself has become cultural and even cinematic. The ideological ramifications of this are legion,³¹ and in response I want to propose a re-structuration of film as ideology in line with the spirit of Marxism. This involves an admission that film simultaneously pre-supposes, reflects, targets and shapes a specific form of consumer subjectivity. As Fred Pfeil writes in "The Male Rampage Film":

Once we enter the era of putatively democratic statehood in the West, each and every hegemonic regime of capitalism/territorialism...must necessarily propose its own version of the normative gendered subject.³²

For the final moments of this paper I will undertake an analysis of both *The Phantom Menace* and *The Matrix* to determine precisely what form of "normative gendered subject" these films engage with. *The Phantom Menace* refuses to present a central character as such and this very diversification of attention reflects how the film targets children and adults, men and women alike. Yet, for our purposes here, Qui Gonn Jinn/Liam Neeson is the most cinematically established face in the film. It occurs to me that the casting of Neeson is informed by his previous roles in films such as *Schindler's List* (1993), *Michael Collins* (1996) and *Rob Roy* (1995) where he plays a heavily self-determining historical subject who is always rooted in a specific geographic national space. The very physicality of Neeson seems to confirm this, with his hulking musculature combined with soft Irish vowels demonstrating a sort of soft focus Schwarzenegger.

Yet it is the very emphasis upon time as history and space as geography which collapses within post-modernity. Flung into the post-modern computer generated environment of *The Phantom Menace* Neeson no longer seems able to function. He expounds archaic religious philosophising and moralising which appear at odds with the film's centralisation of trade negotiations. The narrative of the film happens too fast for the cumbersome Neeson. Switches in location, rapid cross-cutting, and special effects heavy images conspire to relegate his authority. Jinn/Neeson fails to operate in a similar way that Jameson cannot cognitively map his way around the postmodern space of The Westin Bonaventure building in the opening chapter of *Postmodernism*. Accordingly, the film culminates with him impaled on a lightsabre and afterwards Neeson threatened to resign from acting in films altogether.³³ In comparison, the Anakin Skywalker character, played by the eight year old Jake Lloyd, seems far more at home. Educated on a diet of pod racing videogames and happy meals, the puckish, improbably wisecracking Anakin can manipulate the outer spaces of *The Phantom Menace* far more effectively. This corresponds to the marketing policy of the film which specifically and cynically targets children, agitating their consumer impulse. *The Phantom Menace* is supremely sensitive to this optimum market. This hierarchy of attention is duplicated in the film's extensive use of the bluescreen special effect. This has the result of focalising attention around white, heterosexualised juvenile agents whilst any kind of engagement with the actual

14. See Timothy Corrigan's "Auteurs and the New Hollywood" in *The New American Cinema*, edited by Jon Lewis. Corrigan illustrates how the auteur principle of Hollywood seventies films was itself foremost a marketing strategy before any particular creative consideration. See too David A. Cook's "Auteur Cinema and the 'Film Generation' in 1970s Hollywood" in the same volume.

15. For further in depth analysis of this critical moment see Jon Lewis's essay "Money Matters" in *The New American Cinema* or Murray Smith's "Theses on the Philosophy of Hollywood History" in *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema* edited by Stephen Neale and Murray Smith (Routledge, 1998).

16. Jon Lewis editor, *The New American Cinema* (Duke University Press, 1998), p.87.

17. Bizarrely Spielberg dedicated *Schindler's List* to Ross and even compared the German philanthropist to the corporate venture capitalist.

18. Janet Wasko, *Hollywood in the Information Age: Beyond the Silver Screen* (Polity Press, 1994).

19. Jon Lewis editor, *The New American Cinema* (Duke University Press, 1998), p.267.

20. Richard Maltby, *Harmless Entertainment: Hollywood and the Ideology of Consensus* (The Scarecrow Press inc., 1983), p.17.

21. See *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema* in footnote number 12.

22. Richard Maltby, *Harmless Entertainment: Hollywood and the Ideology of Consensus* (The Scarecrow Press inc. 1983), p.21.

23. *ibid.*, p.21

24. Stephen Neale and Murray Smith editors, *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema* (Routledge, 1998) p.26

25. *Ibid.*, p.40.

26. See also Murray Smith who reckons that "The modular segments...are not merely held in check by the narratives of film as such, but given meaning by them...The movie provides a primary baseline which both endows isolated movie icons with meaning and emotional resonance, and provides a backdrop against which to toy with these associations in other media contexts." (Neale ed., p.14).

27. The pre-production sale of merchandising rights seems to confirm this proposition.

28. *The Matrix* too has various sequels currently in the pipeline.

29. Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner, *Camera Politica: The Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Cinema* (Indiana University Press, 1988).

30. Allen Meek "Benjamin, the televisual and the 'Fascistic Subject'" @ www.latrobe.edu.au/www/screeningthepast/firstrelease/fir998/AMfr4e.htm.

31. I do not here advocate a return to the vulgar Marxism of the likes of Mas'ud Zavadzadeh in *Seeing Films Politically*. I believe that Zavadzadeh's renunciation of various models of analysis from deconstruction and the post Marxism of Laclau and Mouffe to Foucauldian and Deleuzian micropolitics constitutes a simplification.

32. Jon Lewis editor, *The New American Cinema* (Duke University Press, 1998), p.175.

33. Compare here the modernist alienation of Lucas's film THX1138 which centralises a subject within a totalitarian regime with *The Phantom Menace*'s decentring system of postmodern fragmentation.

populations of the worlds encountered and subsequent involvement in anything like history dematerialises into a bluescreen, computer generated backdrop. It may seem far fetched to suggest that a text as fantastical as *The Phantom Menace* performs any ideological function but this is to neglect the fact that what is at stake in the narrative itself hinges precisely on material preoccupations in the negotiation of trade routes and the demonisation of the Trade Federation for restricting free trade to Naboo by activating taxation policies. This can be read in light of the Gatt treaty and the recent WTO talks in Seattle which attempt to open up hitherto protected economies around the world to the global market. Free trade within this paradigm is mistakenly regarded as a human right and squared illegitimately with personal freedom as experienced by the slave colonies in the film. Rather free trade perpetuates the globalisation of the multimedia and determine the World Bank's structural adjustment and dollarization of local economies unable to compete on a level playing field. As Sherif Hetata writes:

What the World Bank calls structural adjustment is a potential economic genocide. The dollarization of prices in the South means raising these prices to world levels equal to those prevalent in the United States and Europe. However, average earnings in the South are seventy times lower than in the North.³⁴

The Phantom Menace works to legitimate this process of connecting economies to one another without admitting the dangers inherent to local populations which are rendered virtual in the film. In this respect *The Phantom Menace* engages in a direct ideological agenda which serves to stimulate juvenile consumer activity whilst simultaneously authenticating neo-colonialism.

The use of special effects in *The Matrix* is equally ideologically freighted and centres also on the concept of freedom and how this chafes with the market. The film appeals to a distinct Althusserian/Lacanian model whereby Thomas Anderson's subjectivity is entirely the product of his computer-generated environment. As with the multimedia concept of film, the matrix wraps around Anderson, an anonymous computer clerk in a huge alienating corporation, in a far more invasive fashion than Maltby could have reckoned back in 1983. As Morpheus/Laurence Fishburne spells out, "The Matrix is everywhere, it is all around us." Yet Anderson's dual identity as Neo, a computer hacker, enables him to escape the computer programme of control and the dulcification of the subject which in the film's narrative is used to feed the machines. Neo is able to step outside of the frame and realise the true conditions of his lived experience. This permits Neo to be re-born in 2099 to the realisation that the future has already occurred and that the world is now controlled by machines. So whilst the subject believes that it is being entertained in 1999, in actuality it is being exploited in 2099. Again, science fiction is determined as a history of the present which reduces the agency of the subject in the 1999 present. The film therefore presents cyberspace as a countercultural zone of free information where an opposition to dominant hegemonic structures can be maintained and distance from Jameson's integration of the technological/cultural/economic media can be realised.

As with *The Phantom Menace*, the film's special effects perform an ideological task and ratify this equation. The film pioneers "bullet time", an effect in which by using multiple cameras arranged around a subject, cinematic time can be frozen and the point-of-view rotate around the subject. This produces the effect of seemingly deconstructing the screen's limit. Film becomes an

immersive environment such as that which cyberspace purports to be. "Bullet time" in its democratising, inclusive effect is thus the opposite of bluescreen's hierarchising of the spectator's attention. *The Matrix* therefore constructs cyberspace as an area where auto-emancipation from corporate power is possible. Yet as Jameson writes in his essay "Globalization as Philosophical Issue":

I believe that globalization is a communicational concept which alternately masks and transmits cultural or economic meanings...What happens is that the technology and what the computer people call information begin to slip insensibly in the direction of advertisements and publicity, of post-modern marketing, and finally of the export of TV...In our attempt to think this new, still purely communicational concept, we begin to fill in the empty signifier with visions of financial transfers and investments all over the world, and the new networks begin to swell with the commerce of some new and allegedly more flexible capitalism.³⁵

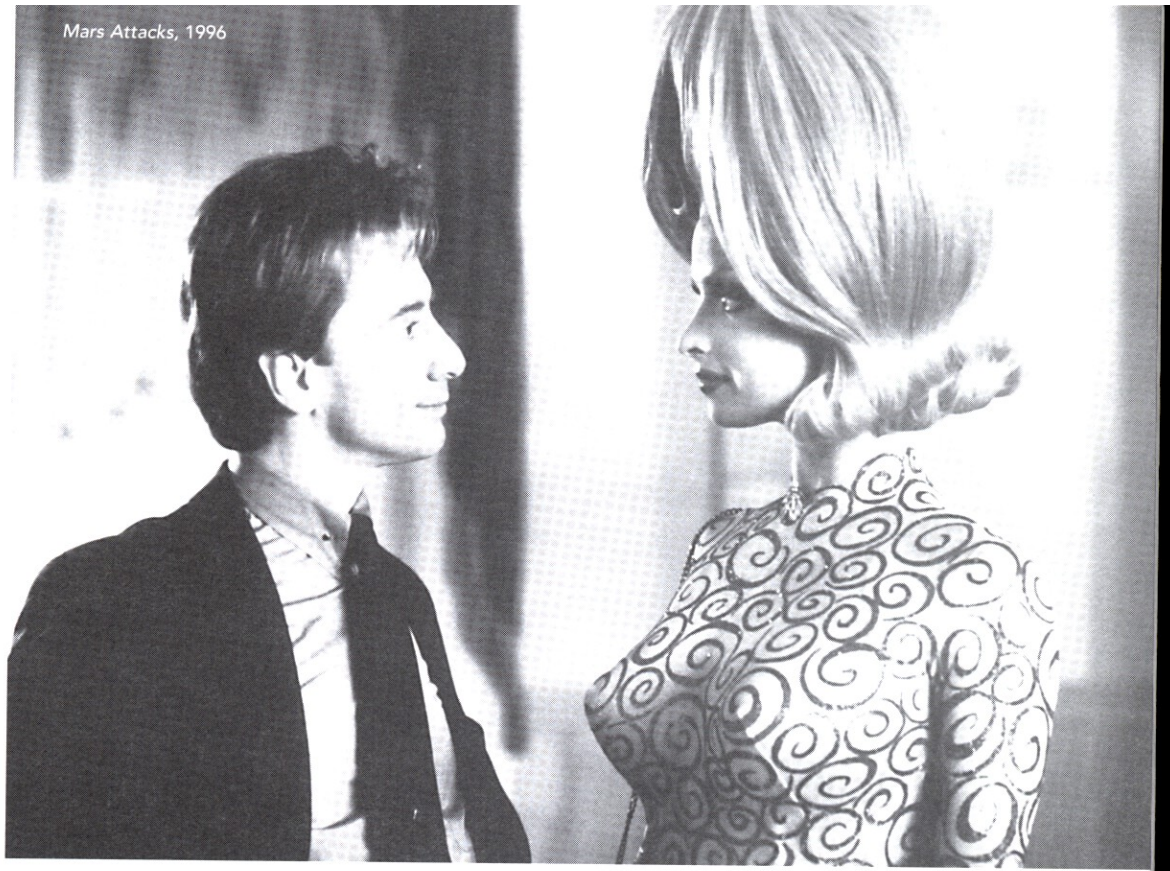
In respect of Jameson's exchange of the technological revolution as a communicational revolution in favour of merely a more efficient mode of late capitalism, I will now close by re-analysing *The Matrix*. Cyberspace in this formula becomes a massive interactive shopping arcade such as that visited by Neo to download military hardware. It immediately becomes apparent that Neo's "freedom" is facilitated absolutely by his dexterity with telecommunicational hardware. His combat prowess is similarly registered in the fact that his "neural kinetics are way above average," this effectively means that he is fast. In this respect he himself operates much like a computer whose effectivity is also recorded in terms of speed. In *The Matrix* technological hardware becomes an indispensable bio-prosthesis. In this respect, Neo's acclimatisation to techno-globalisation makes him, like Anakin, a far more effective consumer than Qui Gonn Jinn. The definitive moment of this effect is realised by Neo's inability to operate without his mobile phone. His Nokia enables him to navigate between the matrix and the "real" world, it connects and mediates between the two. The telecommunications revolution in this sense is merely a further marketing strategy and another acceleration in capitalist exchange. Rather than reflecting the emancipation of the subject from power structures, cyberspace is integrated into the late capitalist system to connect markets with one another. Neo in this paradigm is a specifically designed late capitalist consumer who is susceptible to the appeal of various expensive hard and softwares. Within this re-evaluation of the internet as a free zone it becomes no longer tenable to position Neo outside of the matrix of the media/entertainment industrial complex.

On an historical level, reference to Nokia is especially revealing. Nokia is a Finnish company and its engagement with the Time Warner produced film *The Matrix* enacts the emergence of American venture capital which is currently closing in on the European telecommunications market as outlined in *The Observer* article. American monies continue to penetrate all spaces culminating in the ultimately supposedly free space, the future. As we approach the millennium, it seems that in the light of speculative capitalism, what will happen, already has.

34. Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi editors, *The Cultures of Globalization* (Duke University Press, 1998), p.276.

35. Ibid., p.56.

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Representing Pre-Millennial Tensions

Hollywood's Gendered Invasion Narratives

by Diane R. Wiener

As we approach our own millennium, the epidemics of hysterical disorders, imaginary illnesses, and hypnotically induced pseudomemories that have flooded the media seem to be reaching a high-water mark. These hystories are merging with the more generalized paranoias, religious revivals, and conspiracy theories that have always characterized American life, and the apocalyptic anxieties that always accompany the end of a century. Elaine Showalter¹

I was dreamin' when I wrote this Forgive me if it goes astray But when I woke up this mornin' Coulda sworn it was judgment day The sky was all purple, there were people runnin' everywhere Tryin' 2 run from the destruction, U know I didn't even care. 'Cuz they say two thousand zero zero party over, Oops, out of time So tonight I'm gonna party like it's 1999. Prince, "1999"²

The Artist Formerly Known as Prince released his album *1999* via Warner Bros. Records in 1982. Whether or not he anticipated in 1982 what would be the album's refund popularity during 1999, he and Warner Bros. have benefitted (and during 2000 will probably continue to benefit) from the title song's numerous re-mixes, radio playback and club usage. The song effectively and repeatedly speaks about and to what is frequently referred

¹ Elaine Showalter, *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Media* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 5-6.

² Prince, "1999," *1999* (Warner Bros. and Controversy Music, 1982).

to as a postmodern age. Some of the song's poignant lines include:

"War is all around us, my mind says prepare 2 fight
So if I gotta die I'm gonna listen 2 my body tonight"

"everybody's got a bomb,
we could all die any day
But before I'll let that happen,
I'll dance my life away,"

"Mommy—why does everybody have a bomb?"³

The Artist, his "real" name an un-name, his alternate name a multi-gendered symbol, is a paradigm for the current postmodern, post-structuralist contention that identity is a performance always under construction. Some say we must "party" in these uncertain times, while others busy themselves, perhaps anguished and worried about the non-cohesive underpinnings of this *fin de siècle*.

I observe a trend in recent Hollywood-produced science fiction films that comments upon North Americans' supposed pre-millennial tensions. While we continue to have the opportunity to gaze upon demonized and/or exoticized alien life forms, since 1995 a spate of science fiction films have depicted allegedly empowered, human female protagonists who, side by side with their male counterparts, fight to protect the United States and/or the world from intra- and extraterrestrial alien intrusion. I term these films Hollywood's invasion narratives, a genre that includes three thematic types: viral infection (e.g. *12 Monkeys* [1995], *Outbreak* [1995]), alien takeover and relationships (e.g. *Mars Attacks!* [1996], *Contact* [1997]) and killer asteroids, comets or meteors (e.g. *Deep Impact* [1998], *Armageddon* [1998]).⁴

Deep Impact depicts late twentieth century worries about a comet whose path is destined to collide with the Earth. Shelters are erected, emergency protocols put in place, and these "secrets" are successfully kept from the American people until a young, troublemaking female news reporter gets her first scoop. The plotline, led by racialized and gendered family dramas, does not maintain primary focus upon the reporter, Jenny Lerner/Teá Leoni, but instead becomes obsessed with male power and media subplots beyond Lerner's control.

Armageddon is concerned with "an asteroid the size of Texas" which, like *Deep Impact's* comet, is headed straight for Earth. Harry S. Stamper/Bruce Willis leads "the world's best deep core drilling team...sent to nuke the rock from the inside."⁵ His mouthy daughter Grace/Liv Tyler metaphorically holds the American nation's hands with gendered finesse as it watches ongoing, televised images of Daddy and the crew trying to save the world (at the expense of many lost lives, including Dad Stamper's).

Outbreak begins with genius scholar and scientist Robby Keough/Rene Russo's impressive initiation of methods and mechanisms to "contain an epidemic of a deadly airborne virus."⁶ Soon after the story unfolds, ex-husband and fellow scientist Sam Daniels/Dustin Hoffman, aided by General Billy Ford/Morgan Freeman and a crew of military fighters and EPA/FDA types, must step in to help the little lady out of a jam, and, of course, save the planet.

Mars Attacks!, half macabre comedy, half drama, is director Tim Burton's send-up of a late twentieth century Martian invasion. While the large ensemble cast has numerous female protagonists (including the wickedly funny First Lady, Marsha Dale/Glenn Close), it is the male military and governmental leaders who must teach the aliens a lesson.

Contact is the only film on my list that has a continuously empowered female protagonist (Dr. Ellie Arroway/Jodie Foster). This film addresses relationships with aliens more so than

takeover by aliens. However, the film's subtexts comment upon a fear of alien invasion. One film summary states: "After years of searching, [Arroway] finds conclusive radio proof of intelligent aliens who send plans for a mysterious machine" to the Earth.⁷ Arroway eventually grabs the opportunity to be the newly-built machine's first pilot, chosen by the scientific community's male leadership.

While inside the machine, Arroway moves through an alternative space-time continuum and meets an alien, who is cloaked as a hologram-like representation of her long-deceased, beloved father (whose shocking demise, according to the plot, encouraged her to spend her life searching for extra-terrestrial intelligence). Her return to American consensual reality is greeted with the male gaze's scientific and spiritual skepticism, and she simultaneously must face and cope with her own self-doubts about what she saw, experienced and still believes.

The catch here is that while her power is questioned yet prevails, her sanity is likewise questioned and does not necessarily prevail, depending upon one's critical interpretation. She can have her power, but at what cost? If she is crazy, does she indeed keep any power at all?

12 Monkeys stars James Cole/Bruce Willis, a time traveler-turned-mental-patient, his psychiatrist Kathryn Railly/Madeleine Stowe, and Jeffrey Goines/Brad Pitt, another mental patient whose life as an animals rights activist defies his father's corporate science practices. Eventually, the nutty son becomes the leader of an underground band, the 12 Monkeys, anarchists who find the fatal virus (manufactured for biological warfare by Goines' father's company) that destroys humanity in 1997.

The underground contraband name, 12 Monkeys, while it calls forth anti-experimentation humanitarianism, also hearkens back to images of the John T. Scopes monkey trial, and the audacity of believing in evolution, let alone animal rights. Goines' craziness and eventual leadership of the 12 Monkeys summons historical linkages between madness, eugenics and the fear of human devolution. His lack of stereotypical male control, accompanied by his commitment to animal rights and environmentalism rather than warfare, might be described by his patriarchal father as "monkey business." In between and in contrast to Stowe and Willis' roles, Pitt's role is a liminal one, linked to the figure of the dangerously toxic while protective female, central to my discussion.

Cole, a penal colony member in post-apocalyptic 2035, is sent back in time to 1996 in an alternative-to-incarceration guinea pig role, to stop the virus from reaching its lethal proportions. Initially, Cole is accidentally sent back to 1990, when he meets his lovely and intelligent psychiatrist. In 1990, he is believed to be crazy because he describes events which have yet to transpire, events too far-fetched to be acceptable in the late twentieth century.

Eventually, Dr. Railly believes Cole is both special and truthful, when he disappears out of four-point restraints, and reappears six years later to show her the secrets of the band of 12 Monkeys. Initially his healer and savior, she becomes his sidekick and helps him (unsuccessfully) try to save the world.

The "12" in *12 Monkeys* can be interpreted as a metonym for the 12 apostles, the name itself thereby setting up a postmodern, chaotic conflict between co-existent creationism/religion and evolutionism/science. The posters of the 12 Monkeys, shown by Cole to his psychiatrist as proof that he is not crazy, are red and spiralled. The film begins with a swirling, nauseous pastiche of these poster images, virally uncontrollable in their blood-colored, semiotically reproducing frenzy.

While Matthew Ruben capably uses *12 Monkeys* to explore 1990s brand commodity fetishism, race, poverty and global capitalism's exploitation of postmodern circumstances to forward its own ends,⁸ I use *12 Monkeys* as a case study or template⁹ to examine what I see as a late twentieth century Hollywood trend of new



Alien: Resurrection, 1997

wave misogyny, full to the brim with impersonations of counter-hegemony and empowerment while it differently and more insidiously reinscribes the sexist propaganda that is unsurprisingly "Hollywood." The other five films are referenced to denote the trend to which I am referring.

These films were released for public consumption between 1995 and 1998, and their contemporary narratives/storylines speak to and accentuate the supposedly prevalent popular anxiety related to the coming millennial change. This anxiety, if voiced, might wearily or excitedly ask: what will become of us? will we all perish? will we be transformed? will the world be an entirely new place?

On the surface, the important roles women maintain within these films suggest their valuation within a changing hegemonic sensibility: these women with apparently strong voices are portrayed as having political, economic and cultural capital. However, regardless of these initially "politically correct" depictions, in each case it is the male protagonist(s) who inevitably must save the day, and women remain having less than primary status.

More than being mere muses, these initially empowered women are demoted and (sometimes) redeemed when elevated to buddy or sidekick status, a location formerly reserved for the lucky Tonto, Sancho Panza, Barney Fife and their ilk. Unlike 1990s female buddy movies (initially popularized by the success of *Thelma and Louise* [1991]), here the girls get to play right along with the boys instead of being utterly ghettoized. I will now briefly discuss the presence of female monsters and heroes in recent science fiction films in order to contextualize ways for thinking about gender dynamics within the invasion narrative genre.

Late twentieth century feminist scholarship gives sustained

critical attention to the North American mainstream film industry's ongoing tendency to create female monsters and grotesqueries. Within arguments made by Barbara Creed, Marina Warner and others, this ancient fear of the Harpy or Siren, manifested through *Godzilla* and company's legacy, is now echoed with the multimedia finesse and computerized refinements found in *Jurassic Park* (1993), its sequel *The Lost World: Jurassic Park* (1997), the *Alien* tetralogy¹⁰ and the *Species* (1995) phenomenon (soon to become a series—*Species II* was released in 1997).

Discussing Crichton's book and its film adaptation, Warner begins her analysis of *Jurassic Park* as follows:

Is the terror the velociraptors inspire in any way connected to their femaleness? It isn't emphasized as such—though the book calls the park a matriarchy. Yet popular films of this kind often refract popular concerns in metaphorical terms, and then reinforce them.¹¹ *Jurassic Park*, *The Lost World: Jurassic*

3 Ibid.

4 I am grateful to R. Luna Fernandez for talking with me about this trend, and encouraging me to critically discuss it in writing. Thanks also to Barbara Babcock and Ronit Fainman-Frenkel for their comments on earlier drafts of this essay, and to Susan White for her mentorship as a feminist film scholar.

5 "Armageddon" The Internet Movie Database Ltd., 1999, n. pag.

6 "Outbreak" The Internet Movie Database Ltd., 1999 n. pag.

7 "Contact" The Internet Movie Database Ltd., 1999, n. pag.

8 Matthew Ruben "12 Monkeys and the Failure of Everything: For a New Method" *Rethinking Marxism* 10 (1998), 106-123.

9 Thanks to Judd E. Ruggill for helping me develop this "template" strategy and for sharing his media expertise with me.

10 The tetralogy's chronology is: *Alien* (1979), *Aliens* (1986), *Alien 3* (1992), and *Alien: Resurrection* (1997).

11 Marina Warner, "Monstrous Mothers: Women Over the Top." *Six Myths of Our Time: Little Angels, Little Monsters, Beautiful Beasts and More* (New York: Vintage, 1994), 5.

Park, the *Alien* tetralogy and *Species/Species II* point to Hollywood's apparent obsession with depicting anxiety-rendering, uncontrollable female fecundity, as translated and sieved through the sci-fi adventure film genre's xenophobia, xenophilia, and attendant misogynies and racisms.

Concluding her discussion of *Alien*'s final scenes, Barbara Creed remarks,

We can see [the horror film's] ideological project as an attempt to shore up the symbolic order by constructing the feminine as an imaginary 'other' which must be repressed and controlled in order to secure and protect social order. Thus, the horror film stages and re-stages a constant repudiation of the maternal figure.¹²

In 1993, Creed published a book on her Kristevan thesis of the abject monstrous-feminine, as initially discussed in the 1986 *Screen* essay cited above.¹³ *Alien*, *Aliens* and *Alien 3* are all addressed in this volume. Due to the book's historicity, Creed does not interpret the tetralogy's fourth artifact, *Alien: Resurrection*. However, she does expand her 1986 analysis by addressing some of Ellen Ripley/Sigourney Weaver's transformations from the first to the third film.

While Creed's psychoanalytic approach privileges Ripley's maternal roles and uses them to suggest the ways conflicting forms of maternalization may lead to female personal destruction in the guise of some allegedly greater good, I see Ripley as less delimited by maternal roles than does Creed. Ripley clearly possesses and exerts complex maternal abilities, and she is also appreciated, envied and decried for powers that may be viewed as maternal but are not always contingent upon maternity, including: intelligence, strategic skill, brute strength, and leadership. Certainly, it is possible that some fellow characters perceive her to be dangerous partly because they fear or are threatened by a

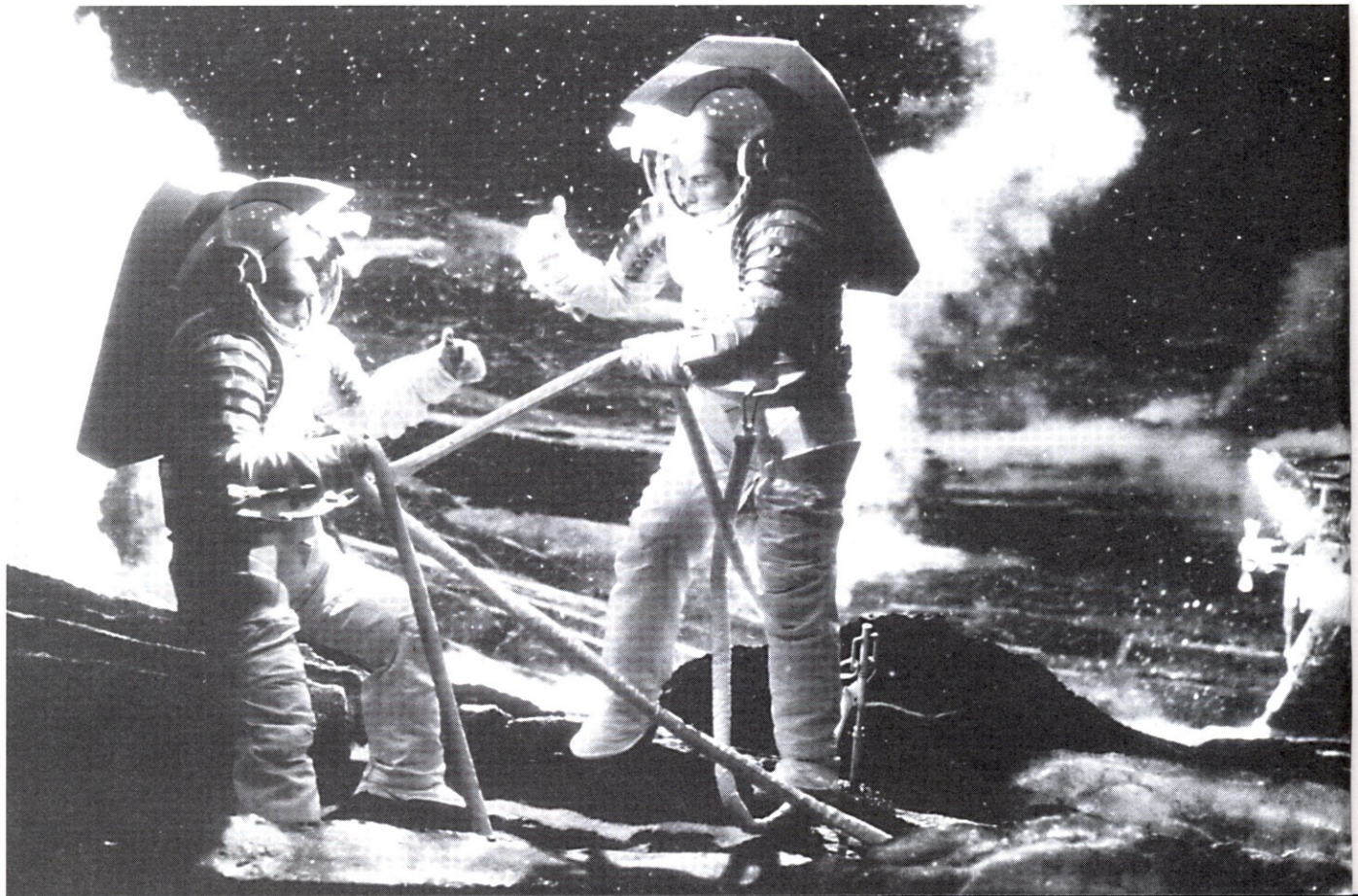
tough and reproductively capable woman. However, I believe it is Ripley's complex femaleness more so than her complex motherliness that elicits potent feelings among her peer characters, and among the film's consumers.

Over the course of the tetralogy, Ripley is depicted as decreasingly stereotypically feminine. While she is a fierce, even viciously protective mother in *Aliens*, she has many roles other than "the fecund mother-as-abyss" highlighted by Creed as "central to *Alien*."¹⁴ The reasons Ripley becomes and succeeds as a respected and often violent leader in *Alien 3* are more than merely maternal. In *Alien: Resurrection*, Ripley has been cloned and is therefore reborn after the self-imposed death she sought to rid her body of the alien that invaded her. Ripley, who can be seen in this film as a kind of post-woman, is more homophilic with than mothering toward a younger, female cyborg crew member, played by Winona Ryder.

The *Alien* series, both post-millennial and post-apocalyptic, initially reinforces and later challenges or even disrupts horror/sci-fi's depictions of a monstrous-feminine who is and must remain a "controlled" entity, an "imaginary 'other'." Within my discussion, an important key is the post-twentieth century "reality" within which the *Alien* tetralogy's images unfold, a fantasy locus perhaps less immediately threatening than our own time. Creed's assertions are helpful for imagining how femaleness is comparatively "constructed" within science fiction's pre-millennial invasion narratives. She cogently remarks, "*Alien 3* is set in the past which is also the future; this is the end of the world, the death of civilization, the Apocalypse heralded by the arrival of the alien/woman."¹⁵

Apparently, it is too dangerous to have a truly progressive and strong female protagonist represented within a pre-millennial period. Futuristic depictions that index the pre-millennial past, even the kind of "past which is also the future," provoke images of terrifying women. Perhaps the subtextual message viewers are to glean is that the thing to be feared is not the virus or the meteor or the

Deep Impact, 1998



alien, but, like *Godzilla* and her *Jurassic Park* contemporaries, the (reproductive) female herself. Potentially, the fear of viral contagion and alien or meteor invasion is also the fear and/or fetishization of female intrusion into or infection of male spaces.

The North American New Age industry has invested and earned capital from what could be called a niche-market of the supposedly pre-millennially tense and anxious, and those curious about "them." Pilgrimages to Quartzite, attendance at localized workshops, and the consumption of pop psychology books, bestsellers and films all point to intra- and extra-New Age industry's capitalist profitability spaces. What Elaine Showalter describes as "hystories" are beyond pandemic in their imagined and literal proportions:

Hysteria not only survives in the 1990s, it is more contagious than in the past. Infectious diseases spread by ecological change, modern technology, urbanization, jet travel, and human interaction. Infectious epidemics of hysteria spread by stories circulated through self-help books, articles in newspapers and magazines, TV talk shows and series, films, the Internet, and even literary criticism. The cultural narratives of hysteria, which I call hystories, multiply rapidly and uncontrollably in the era of mass media, telecommunications, and e-mail.¹⁶

I interpret the three types of invasion stories as examples of the "cultural narratives" understood by Showalter. While Hollywood in the late 1990s spends and amasses blockbuster dollars by hearkening back to Elizabethan and Victorian Europe, a large part of its imagination and attention is also devoted to and frolics among the invaded and invading. Interestingly, Showalter describes the pathways of contagion and infection as "rapidly and uncontrollably" multiplying, a remark that recalls images of mass culture as the to-be-feared, endlessly reproducing, fecund woman.

Mass culture long ago became a new form of "nature," and the information age, as novels like *White Noise*¹⁷ tell us, has not only furthered this nature's inability to be self-controlled, but our inability to "master" it or ourselves.¹⁸ Donna Haraway points out that "Natural history can be—and has sometimes been—a means for millennial expectation and disorderly action."¹⁹ If the information age and mass culture are our current understanding of "nature," it seems, following Showalter, that a consequence of this is a new "natural hystory," of which *12 Monkeys* is a part. Perhaps "natural hystory" produces "millennial expectation and disorderly action" as much as the other way around?

In the concluding sentiments of "Mass Culture as Woman," Huyssen articulates how the decline in the tendency to gender mass culture "as feminine and inferior" accompanies "the decline of modernism itself."²⁰ He states,

The universalizing ascription of femininity to mass culture always depended on the very real exclusion of women from high culture and its institutions. Such exclusions are, hopefully forever, a thing of the past. Thus, the old rhetoric has lost its persuasive power because the realities have changed.²¹

Unfortunately, despite his hopeful wishes, while often-seen-as-feminine mass culture has in some ways incorporated female voices, and the lives and utterances allegedly spoken by these voices, women are differently absented or excluded than had previously been the case from creative representations of "reali-



12 Monkeys, 1995

ties [that] have changed." These creative representations include late twentieth century Hollywood invasion narratives.

At face-value, movies like *12 Monkeys* and its sisters seem to promote images of female strength, class privilege and monetary liberation. The female protagonist bandwagon reads as follows: *12 Monkeys*' psychiatrist, *Outbreak*'s expert scientist, *Mars Attacks*' national leader, *Contact*'s expert scientist, *Deep Impact*'s powerhouse reporter, and (last, and I think, least impressive) *Armageddon*'s tough girl. What do these female roles say about our obsessive, simulacra-filled times? Discussing terrorism, transvestitism and cancer in the light of postmodernism, Baudrillard points out,

All these forms are viral -fascinating, indiscriminate and their virulence is reinforced by their images, for the modern media have a viral force of their own, and their virulence is contagious. Ours is a culture in which bodies and minds are irradiated by signals and images; little wonder, then, that for all its

12 Barbara Creed "Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection" *Screen* 27 (1986), 70.

13 Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993).

14 Ibid., 25.

15 Ibid., 52.

16 Showalter, 5.

17 Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985).

18 George Henderson uses *White Noise* to articulate the theme of "second nature" in an undergraduate cultural studies course for which I had the pleasure of being a Teaching Associate.

19 Donna Haraway, "Teddy Bear Patriarchy Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908-1936" *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 44.

20 Andreas Huyssen, "Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism's Other" *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture*. Ed. Tania Modleski (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 205.

21 Ibid., 205-206.

marvels this culture also produces the most murderous viruses.²²

The female characters mentioned live in, and I would say embody, these "viral" forms. While they seem to have power and embrace leadership roles, it is the male characters who must intervene and take over to "denature" each invasion narrative's sickness. In *12 Monkeys*, this invading mechanism is not only symbolically "viral," it is a virus. It contains within its own make-up the ability to reproduce at proportions that threaten to destroy humankind itself. This virus can be read as a female, racialized image, a figure of feared mass culture in our information age, "fascinating" while toxic, unhygienic, intrusive and "indiscriminate." According to Huyssen, the "realities have changed," but perhaps they have merely shifted gears, and place blame for disease among the usual suspects.

Discussing the power of representations and representation making in her essay "The Ideological Impediment: Epistemology, Feminism and Film Theory," feminist film theorist Jennifer Hammett remarks:

What we need in order to challenge patriarchy is not an alternative epistemic relation to the real. To the extent that the struggle is over ideas—that is, over representations—what is needed is not a feminist position *vis-a-vis* representation, but feminist representations.²³

Hammett concludes her discussion wondering whether or not "feminist film critics need feminist film theory."²⁴ It is now well known that film viewers, critics and society's other members are inescapably influenced by ideology's unrelenting grasp, and Hammett tells her reader there is "nothing categorical we can say about representations/beliefs."²⁵ She cautions against feminist film theorists' arguing about the fact of representation making instead of inventing our own representations. Hammett believes that feminist theorists ought to be "arguing over the validity of particular beliefs" rather than the validity of some beliefs' representations.²⁶

Among the "particular beliefs" validated by Hollywood's invasion narratives, chaos, madness, potential death, fecundity and femaleness are inextricably linked. While symbolic women may act as helpful catalysts, their main roles lie behind and beside their good symbolic male hero counterparts. Craig Owens tells us, "Film composes narratives out of a succession of concrete images, which makes it particularly suited to allegory's essential pictogrammatism."²⁷ Addressing director Terry Gilliam's talent, one *12 Monkeys* reviewer remarks, "Gilliam uses skewed camera angles and histrionic performances to conjure a modern allegory for our disease-and paranoia-ridden culture."²⁸ A viewer's ability to accept these narratives' "particular" and "conjured" beliefs hinges upon postmodern allegorical contextualizations of female, unable-to-be-"pure" power turned into dependent, "histrionic" disempowerment. Discussing postmodernism, Owens remarks:

Photography and film, based as they are on single-point perspective, are transparent mediums; their derivation from the Classical system of representation is obvious, yet remains to be investigated critically. Artists who deal with such images work to expose them as instruments of power. Not only do they investigate the ideological messages encoded therein, but, more importantly, the strategies and tactics whereby such images secure their authoritative status in our culture.²⁹

I join feminist critics, artful in their own right, to continue to "investigate" the invasion film genre's "encoded messages," and those "strategies and tactics whereby [its] images secure their authoritative status." Such investigations are aided by looking

toward Mary Douglas' work in symbolic anthropology and its relevance for discussing gendered representations of impurity and disease.

In comments immediately applicable to *12 Monkeys'* viruses and viral symbolism, Baudrillard points to postmodernism's key symbols, deep structures and root metaphors without overtly referencing Douglas when he says,

The high degree to which AIDS, terrorism, crack cocaine or computer viruses mobilize the popular imagination should tell us that they are more than anecdotal occurrences in an irrational world. The fact is that they contain within them the whole logic of our system: these events are merely the spectacular expression of that system. They all hew to the same agenda of virulence and radiation, an agenda whose very power over the imagination is of a viral character. an outbreak of AIDS, even a statistically insignificant one, forces us to view the whole spectrum of disease in the light of the immunodeficiency thesis.³⁰

As Douglas famously remarked,

If we can abstract pathogenicity and hygiene from our notion of dirt, we are left with the old definition of dirt as matter out of place. This is a very suggestive approach. It implies two conditions: a set of ordered relations and a contravention of that order. Dirt then, is never a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt, there is system. Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements. This idea of dirt takes us straight back into the field of symbolism and promises a link-up with more obviously symbolic systems of purity.³¹

Reading Baudrillard's comments in the context of Douglas's theoretical stance, it follows that *12 Monkeys* not only allegorically comments upon what Lyotard called the "postmodern condition,"³² but exports numerous messages about late twentieth century North America's associations of femaleness with dirt, disorder, chaos, disease in general and viruses in particular, intrusion and an absence of "pure," orderly, systematized male power. Therefore, despite alleged improvements in Hollywood's female characterizations, it is no wonder (and, following Owens, it can be viewed as "transparent") that maleness must consistently step forward to cleanse, purify and save each female-dirty day.

22 Jean Baudrillard, "Superconductive Events" *The Transparency of Evil: Essays on Extreme Phenomena*. Trans. James Benedict (London: Verso, 1993), 36-37.
23 Jennifer Hammett, "The Ideological Impediment: Epistemology, Feminism, and Film Theory" *Film Theory and Philosophy*. Ed. Richard Allen and Murray Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 257.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid., 256.

26 Ibid.

27 Craig Owens, *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture*. Ed. Scott Bryson, Barbara Kruger, Lynne Tillman and Jane Weinstock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 80.

28 John Fried, Rev. of *12 Monkeys*. *Cineaste* 22 (1996), 49.

29 Owens, 111.

30 Jean Baudrillard, "Prophylaxis and Virulence" *The Transparency of Evil: Essays on Extreme Phenomena*. Trans. James Benedict (London: Verso, 1993), 67.

31 Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. (London: Routledge, 1991), 36.

32 Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).

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Out of the Depths and Through the Postmodern Surface

History and Class Figuration in *Titanic*

by David Anshen

[...] never, never in history, has the horizon of the thing whose survival is being celebrated (namely, all the old models of the capitalist and liberal world) been as dark, threatening, and threatened. Jacques Derrida 1994

As the new century arrives, we think of the future. The state of the world, the state of film and culture, and the unfolding of history all spark debate and concern. But the debate has tended to be one-sided. The belief that criticism can help us understand our confusing and turbulent time seems buried in a sea of fears. Confidence in the power of ideas to help think about and change our world may be at an all-time low. An extreme disparity between unstable economic and social conditions, new technological and material changes, and the corresponding lack of critical analysis that even claims to offer a way out, seems greater than any previous moment in human history. Scholars and cultural critics often seem particularly submerged in a kind of pessimism of the intellect. This article is a modest intervention, a polemic, against this tide. I take a particular film, offer a political reading, and contrast it to the larger cultural and critical approach to our moment, the powerful cultural discourse that has been called postmodernism. To do this, I explore how this concept functions in the film criticism of Fredric Jameson, a theorist whose work I admire greatly and whom I borrow from. In addition, I examine briefly a





particular critical reading of the particular film, more typical than mine, which although sharing many of my concerns, overlooks the moments in which, the seemingly ever-present ideological hegemony of capitalism is challenged. All of this is an attempt to provide evidence that beneath the seemingly spotless surface of economic and political consensus, it is possible to detect the presence of something else. We have reason to believe that the future, which may hold dangers and disruptions, might also contain the possibility of resistance, systematic critique, and the hope of something new. Finally, I would like to dedicate this essay to the memory of Dr Michael Sprinker (1950-1999), a great friend, teacher, comrade, Marxist, and believer in the future.

James Cameron's blockbuster film, *Titanic*, begins with black-and-white clips of masses of people waving at the ship. This brings to mind documentary footage and its association with historical events—often beyond our memory—kept alive through frequent viewing. Documentaries are the visual form in which we often see the past—not the distant past, but the past before our lived experiences. It creates the illusion that the film will offer the real story about historical events. An aura of objectivity is projected. Immediately afterwards, the screen shifts to an underwater scene full of vivid colors. The calm of the oceanic environment is disrupted by the presence of strange and ominous looking technological machinery. The effect suggests the unreal quality of science fiction, particularly other films directed by Cameron that have become culturally familiar, such as *Aliens* and *The Abyss*. As the camera zooms towards the undersea wreck, the image gradually changes into a screen recognizable as the viewfinder of a video camera. In the background a voice narrates a standard, melodramatic recounting of the story of the sinking of the *Titanic*. The account is precise and objective but leaves out any of the human tragedy in the disaster. This short mini-narrative ignores the greed and arrogance that led to the sinking of the ship, the lack of concern for human life, class privilege, and other human elements that are precisely those features that are usually highlighted in the tale that has long played a part in popular imagination.¹ The telling of the story is punctuated by another voice that interrupts to pronounce a verdict; "You're so full of shit boss!"

This ironic and self-reflexive interruption of the narrative is only momentary. We continue to receive a mixture of images that move us between the past, the present, and suggest the future. These quick shifts in time are not incidental but, as we shall see, lay the groundwork for continuous temporal disjunctions of the film's narrative. These shifts in time recur at all significant moments in the film, from the very beginning, around the intermission, and at the end. The early shifts can disorient the viewer, confuse the sense of time, and suggests the importance of the ongoing dialectic of the film's attention to past, present, and the future. The structural attention to time highlights the largely unacknowledged problematics of the film, namely: How can we understand and think about the relation of the past to the present? What uncertainties and fears about the future remain today and are tapped into in this film? Since time distinctions are blurred initially, and subsequently continue to shift at key moments in the narrative, this provides a clue to a much-debated question in commentary on the film: What explains its mass cultural appeal and significance at this time?² My answer is that the film concerns the present. It does not offer us a distant image of the past but instead focuses questions about contemporary life and the future. The film functions as an expression of anti-capitalist sentiment, which explains its enormous and somewhat puzzling mass appeal, and warns of social turbulence to come. It illustrates hidden features about contemporary life and mass consciousness that are often obscured by accounts of our "postmodern" existence. Therefore my reading of this film places it within a debate about our historical and cultural moment. My proposed interpretation of the film and its popularity are directed against theoretical, cultural, or historical periodizing which denies the possibility or even the popular desire for deep fundamental changes in the economic and social relations in late capitalist society.

This understanding of the film flies in the face of much conventional logic about our historical moment in several ways. First, we hear much talk about the "end of history" and the loss of a "sense of history."³ This of course, accompanies the claim of a "death of Marxism,"—which, as even Jacques Derrida remarks, has a strangely familiar tone.⁴ He points out in his recent



encounter with Marxism, *Specters of Marx*, that this newfound capitalist triumphalism itself has a long history. And of course, the "end of history" has its own history, perhaps beginning with one of the major philosophic champions of history itself, namely Hegel.⁵ In retrospect, few accept his view that the victory of Napoleon over the Prussian State actually meant the triumph of reason and the end of history, just as few share Hegel's conviction that Romantic poetry was the culmination of art. Yet, once again we must entertain the possibility that history, or at least historical representation, is in decline, or is over.

These views often circulate under the aegis of the label "postmodernism." Although both partisans and opponents of this trendy label often dispute the term's exact meaning, it is fairly generally agreed that a major feature of postmodernism concerns the supposed paradigmatic shift into a different conception of history with its relation to forms of knowledge and artistic representation. For example, in one of the earliest and most influential discussions of "postmodernism," Jean-François Lyotard defines the "postmodern as incredulity to metanarratives" and goes on to assert, "The narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal. It is being dispersed in clouds of narrative language elements—narrative but also denotative, prescriptive, descriptive, and so on."⁶ Later on the page Lyotard concludes, "They only give rise to institutions in patches—local determinism." This complicated language has generally been interpreted to mean that only local analysis, microrepresentation, and limited knowledge are possible or available. Claims to know or describe the bigger picture break down into the ambiguities of language. History and culture are hopelessly fragmented as part of a kaleidoscope of postmodern existence.

Even Fredric Jameson, the most important Marxist cultural critic in the Anglo-American world, in the premier essay in his work *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, has described postmodernism as being significantly constituted by, "a new depthlessness [...] a whole new culture of the image or the simulacrum, a consequent weakening of historicity, both in our relationship to public History and in the new forms of private temporality."⁷ Jameson takes this macroanalysis of our cultural

logic and applies it to several disparate types of cultural objects. These include a persuasive reading of several "nostalgia films" as examples of the "crisis of historicity."⁸ For Jameson, nostalgia operates differently in "postmodernism" than it did at earlier moments of this century. Following Georg Lukács' important work on the historical novel, Jameson sees classical literary rep-

1 The tale of the Titanic has been told repeatedly in various forms of mass culture, including several films such as *A Night to Remember*; it is even the subject of a folksong written by Huddie Ledbetter a.k.a. Leadbelly. For the lyrics and a very brief synopsis of the story of Leadbelly's writing of the song that was motivated by the ironic fact that the great black boxer, Jack Johnson was denied passage due to a Jim Crow color bar, see *Rise Up Singing: The Group Singing Songbook* ed. Peter Blood and Annie Patterson (Bethlehem PA: Sing Out Corp, 1992), 206.

2 See for example *Titanic: Anatomy of a Blockbuster* ed. Kevin S. Sandler and Gaylyn Studlar (New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999), a recent anthology that collects essays from a variety of critical perspectives to "ask why this film, which is only one among the many fictionalized accounts of the Titanic's sinking produced in the eighty-plus years since the event, should have such appeal with the public."

3 Of course these claims are not identical. For the "end of history" see Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992) and Alexander Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, ed. Allan Bloom, trans. James H. Nichols, Jr. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980). For the end of a "sense of history" see Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), and Fredric Jameson, *The Cultural Turn*, (New York: Verso, 1998). And for a related discussion about the nature of historical representation see Hayden White *Tropics of Discourse*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

4 See Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994).

5 Or perhaps not. Perry Anderson makes a compelling case that the Fukuyama and Kojève interpretation of the supposed 'end of history' may be based on confusing the two ways the word "end" can be used. It can mean either the final point or the purpose. Anderson points out that Hegel himself almost always used the terms *Ziel*, *Zweck*, or *Resultat* rarely *Ende* or *Schluss*. See Perry Anderson "The Ends of History," in *A Zone of Engagement* (London: Verso, 1992), 286.

6 In Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), xxiv.

7 Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 6.

8 Ibid., 22.

9 Titled appropriately enough *The Historical Novel* trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983).

representations of the past as a way of reading backward to assert the possibilities of history for the future.⁹ This is key to my view on how the film version of *Titanic* operates. But for Jameson in the new cultural determinant of postmodernism this kind of historical treatment seems difficult or no longer possible. According to Jameson's article, originally written in 1981, *American Graffiti*, *Chinatown*, *Body Heat*, and even *Star Wars*, reflect our "nostalgia for the present" and our inability to think of the future in terms of significant historical transformations.

Although Jameson's argument can in no way be taken as agreement with the claims of defenders of the "New World Order," such as Francis Fukuyama, there is an increasingly pessimistic drift in Jameson's writings on film that can be traced to his adoption of the descriptive label of postmodernism. Beginning in this essay on postmodernism with this treatment of "nostalgia films" in the 70s and 80s through to his later writings on the importance of "conspiracy films" in the 90s, Jameson seems unwilling to assert the possibility of the kind of increasing "class figuration" that he predicted in one of his earlier treatments of film in the essay, "Class and Allegory in Contemporary Mass Culture: *Dog Day Afternoon* as a Political Film."¹⁰ It is in the spirit of the early essay that I find a useful approach to an interpretation of *Titanic*. Therefore, before returning to *Titanic*, I will elaborate on his earlier, and less read, essay.

Jameson begins his treatment of *Dog Day Afternoon* with a reminder of the centrality of the Marxist conception of social class, which he persuasively claims has both a structural reality and an element in which it is a feature of consciousness. Since, at the time of the essay's composition (like always), the reality of social class was being challenged and described as a relic of "nineteenth century European conditions, and no longer relevant to our situation today,"¹¹ part of the task of the essay is to show the presence of class in mass culture. Jameson terms this its "figura-

bility" and proposes the thesis that if class plays a role in social life there will be cultural evidence that it is "representable" and "visceral and existential."¹² He argues for the importance of culture, in general, as symptomatic of larger social realities but particularly, "commercial film as that medium where, if at all, some change in the class character of social reality ought to be detectable, since social reality and the stereotypes of our experience of everyday social reality are the raw material with which commercial film and television are inevitably forced to work."¹³

After this defense of the importance of mass culture for social analysis, Jameson continues with an allegorical reading of *Dog Day Afternoon* to show the persistence and even growing importance of class relations and class struggle. He accomplishes this not by focusing on the overt political nature of the film, reflected diegetically in its premise of a bank robbery that wins the sympathy of the bank's employees, nor through an analysis of the stylistic features of the performance by Al Pacino (although these are, of course, touched on), but rather by examining the contrasting nature of the characters of the local police chief and the FBI agent in their conflict with each other on the handling of this disruption. Jameson does not see these characters as "two individuals" but rather as standing in for and symbolizing the "local power structure" against the "multinational corporate structures."¹⁴ Their relations with each other and the third figure of the bank robber represent a nascent expression of "class consciousness" and class struggle. Jameson demonstrates a model of allegorical reading of film, in which the changing class structures are presented in individual characters and their interaction, but only implicitly. Decoding the meaning of the film requires an act of interpretation that probes beneath the surface action. The particular characters allegorically stand in for more general social realities. Interestingly, this is a source of criticism of the film for Jameson who denies that it is properly "political" because "the



class system we have been talking about is *merely* implicit in it, and can just as easily be ignored or repressed by its viewers as brought to consciousness. What we have been describing is at best something pre-political."¹⁵ His prognosis goes further and leaves open the possibility that future films can be expected to be "political" in some more direct way. However, in his later writings about film, especially after the adoption of postmodernism as a category, the earlier hope for a return of the more explicitly political meanings seems to fade to be replaced by a growing fascination with the centrality of conspiracy themes in popular culture.¹⁶ In Jameson's most recent work on film, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic*, he theorizes our culture's fascination with these types of films as the attempt, "to think a system so vast that it cannot be encompassed by the natural and historically developed categories of perception with which human beings normally orient themselves."¹⁷ In response to this problem of "think[ing] a system," Jameson introduces a subtle positive feature into conspiratorial films and, by extension, conspiratorial thinking when he writes:

[...] the "conspiratorial text" which, whatever other messages it emits or implies, may also be taken to constitute an unconscious, collective effort at trying to figure out where we are and what landscapes and forces confront us in a late twentieth century whose abominations are heightened by their concealment and their bureaucratic impersonality. Conspiracy film takes a wild stab at the heart of all that, in a situation in which it is the intent and the gesture that counts. Nothing is gained by having been persuaded of the definitive verisimilitude of this or that conspiratorial hypothesis: but in the intent to hypothesize, in the desire called cognitive mapping—therein lies the beginning of wisdom.¹⁸

For Jameson, the form of conspiratorial thinking is more significant than its content, which is often part of the ideology of fascist and right wing movements. Whether the conspiratorial form and its content can or should be separated is a debatable question, but my reading of *Titanic* is premised on the claim that it is not necessary to move to these types of cultural objects, with their dubious political results and impact, to find ways to "think a system" or to experience our present as part of an unfolding dialectic of history.

As a counter-example of a significant popular cultural object, the recent film version of the legend of *Titanic* lends itself easily to an interpretation which stresses its traditional folkloric motifs of rigid class divisions with the modern feature of technological arrogance. These are not left implicit but are overtly brought to the surface. However, an allegorical reading, modeled largely on Jameson's earlier approach, opens up a deeper set of issues and a more interesting set of questions. Not only does the film speak to class relations and class structure, while presenting a critique of the values of commodity fetishism, but it presents a kind of metaphoric warning about the dangers of the smug certainty of post-Cold War capitalist euphoria that is so much a part of contemporary political discourse. The film is a kind of wake-up call that signals a collective uncertainty about the possibility of looming economic, political, and social instability operating just beneath the surface of the society. This implied warning contained in the film can also serve as a critique of much of the logic of globalism and celebratory "postmodern" analysis.

I do not intend to claim unlimited merit for the film. In many ways it is a bad film in that it is filled with clichés, trite dialogue, and relies on the mythic qualities of the star system. It is also an "ideological" film, in the sense that it attempts to stifle and offer a way out of the very contradictions it raises. A clear example is the way it treats class contradictions through the main characters, Rose and Jack. If it foregrounds class divisions in society through the contact between a proletarian lad with a high bour-

geois, almost aristocratic damsel, it also largely resolves these differences through the typical Hollywood tendency, well described by Robert Ray, of the romance that transcends class barriers.¹⁹ The power of love overcomes class differences, allowing true human relations to flourish. Obviously, the film partially suggests fierce class struggle is not necessary if social contradictions can be ameliorated through the young discarding the prejudices of their elders. It is also significant that the main characters love is largely made possible through the mediation of their common interest in art, modern art—the cliché of a common recognition of the value of Picasso, no less—which differentiates Rose from her philistine relations and Jack from his working-class background. It is probably not going too far to see in this banality a kind of contempt for the audience's sensibilities and a kind of assumed cultural naiveté.

In addition, the film operates a kind of "culinary pleasure" as Brecht might put it, or a kind of "mass ornament" using Siegfried Kraucauer's concept. It is loaded with spectacle and familiar Hollywood tropes, such as ornate costumes, scenes on a grand scale, beautiful bodies, and conventional villains. There is a prolonged and almost ridiculous cliffhanger quality to the saving of Jack, who has been handcuffed to a pole in the lower decks. His rescue is the result of Rose's daring when she shows determination and resourcefulness, inverting the typical gender roles, yet not unlike the escapades of a James Bond or Indiana Jones. These scenes are a kind of replaying of very conventional, devices intended to build suspense. The real question is why this film had such mass appeal. At the time of its release for the home video market it was packaged as the "the most popular film of all time." Why should this film display such appeal given its almost completely conventional nature? Is this a clear and unambiguous victory for what Horkheimer and Adorno famously referred to as the "culture industry?"

In her useful exploration of these questions in the essay, "Ship of Dreams: Cross-Class Romance and the Cultural Fantasy of *Titanic*," Laurie Ouellete makes a forceful argument that the film almost completely serves to conceal increasing class divisions in American society.²⁰ She writes, "The issue of class plays an important role in the *Titanic* phenomena, but rather than triggering class consciousness or resistance, the film actually works in the *opposite* direction by mystifying the causes and continuities of the inequalities."²¹ She goes on to explain, "My main argument is the following: while *Titanic* ostensibly addresses class prejudice of the distant past, it also promotes the illusion that the United States is now a classless society [...]"²²

9 Fredric Jameson, "Class and Allegory in Contemporary Mass Culture: *Dog Day Afternoon* as a Political Film," in *Signatures of the Visible* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 35-55.

10 Jameson, "Class and Allegory", 36.

11 Ibid., 37.

12 Ibid., 38.

13 Ibid., 48-50; italics mine.

14 Ibid., 52.

15 Of course in his most recent book *Brecht and Method* (New York: Verso, 1998) there is what I consider a return to the cultural possibilities of classical Marxism. This makes the book a fascinating and important call to take up the mantle of Brechtian 'usefulness.'

16 Fredric Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), 2-3.

17 Ibid., 3.

18 Robert B. Ray, *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

19 In *Titanic: Anatomy of a Blockbuster*, ed. Sandlar and Studlar, 169-188. Other particularly relevant essays to these issues in the volume include "Floating Triumphant: The American Critics on *Titanic*" by Matthew Bernstein, "Heart of the Ocean: Diamonds and Democratic Desire in *Titanic*" by Adrienne Munich and Maura Spiegel, and "Bathos and Bathysphere: On Submersion, Longing, and History in *Titanic*" by Vivian Sobchak.

20 Ouellete, "Ship of Dreams", 169.

21 Ibid., 170.

22 Ibid., 169.

While I do not disagree in total with her argument, I think it vastly overstates the case and leaves crucial aspects of the film out of the analysis. First, on the most superficial level she is indeed correct that the film does not demystify the causes of the inequalities of American society, which seems a lot to ask of any film. Also, the film does not automatically "trigger" class-consciousness. The crucial question posed by Oulette's article is, does the film present a vision of class inequalities of the past that mythologizes the present and somehow suppresses the growing reality of increasing class inequality? She does an eloquent job of summarizing some of the evidence for growing real world inequalities and she quotes several perceptive sociologists about the ideological effort that has always existed in American society to deny the ugly truth about class. Of course, an argument like this gets into the slippery ground of speculation when they try to ascertain why people enjoy the film. Is the audience convincing themselves that we are lucky to live in an egalitarian present, safely removed from this kind of past, or do they enjoy seeing a depiction that rings true to current experience? The film may offer a representation of the past that suggests striking parallels to our present. Many viewers may even enjoy seeing the rich, with all their smug self-satisfaction get their comeuppance.

Her argument that the past is hermetically sealed off from the present in the film seems to largely ignore the structural features of the film that I have discussed. Why narrate a tale entirely concerned with the past inside a frame of the present? And, isn't this a representation of the present strongly coded to suggest an uncertain, and anxiety ridden future? How is the real time present depicted in the film? Have the excavators learned the lessons of the past and moved beyond its contradictions? Why are the financial concerns of the present day excavation highlighted? Why is the older Rose necessary as a living link that allows a real reconstruction of the lived experience of the disaster?

It is interesting to note that in her article Oulette details the hostility towards the film from several centers of ideological power and influence in the capitalist world, what we might call the bourgeois press. She quotes the *Economist* as calling the film "an exercise in class hatred," the *National Review* as "leftist propaganda" and the *Washington Post* as accusing Cameron of "kindergarten Marxism."²³ But, she never considers the implications of these criticisms on how the film should be understood.

I propose that this film serves as a kind of "political unconscious" longing for certain types of emotional compensation from a cold and heartless world, and simultaneously satisfies the desire to "think the system." Its content and popularity can also be read symptomatically as an indication of the underlying and intensifying social contradictions and tensions developing in modern capitalist society. As already mentioned, the film clearly illustrates class differentiation in several ways. The social background of the characters, the different levels of the ship, particularly the scenes in the boiler rooms in which the magical power of this behemoth is revealed to be fuelled by industrial labor in hellish conditions and the question of the priority of lifeboats, to name just a few examples, all involve the spectator in a graphic exposure to class contradictions. There are also scenes that juxtapose the social gatherings of the bourgeoisie to the lively dancing and celebration on the lower levels of the ship. Two worlds are presented, and never to the benefit of the wealthy. Leonardo Di Caprio's character, Jack, tells Rose, "I'll take you to a real party" after having sat through a boring and pretentious dinner with the cream of society. The party on the lower decks highlights the ethnic diversity of the working class while also providing an idealized romanticization of the proletariat who supposedly know how to live, unlike the stuffy ruling class. Yet, of course, the adventurous spirit of Rose allows her to break from convention and partake in the life of the people. She is able to transcend her class background through individual choice. Rose, however, is

not just a figure for class reconciliation or merely one of the children of the privileged who shift allegiance to the cause of the oppressed. She is also scripted specifically to crudely suggest the modernist worldview and the avant-garde itself. She makes references to Picasso and Monet, quotes Freud, and sees her existence in the bourgeois society as a kind of slavery because of its ennui and mundane nature. At least since Baudelaire, a key aspect of the modernist critique of capitalist relations has been framed in precisely these terms. When questioned by Jack about her suicide attempt, she explains her despair for living by telling him she was motivated by, "[...] everything, it was my whole world and all the people in it, and the inertia of my life plunging ahead and powerless to stop it." It is certainly not accidental that this framing of her life's journey towards self-destruction parallels the course of the boat drifting inexorably towards the iceberg. She shows her engagement ring to Jack, who expresses amazement at this gratuitous display of grandeur and wealth, and continues telling him about her impending marriage, "Five hundred invitations have gone out, all of Philadelphia society will be there, and all the while I feel I'm standing in the middle of a crowded room, screaming at the top of my lungs and no one even looks up." This verbalization of dissatisfaction, perhaps coincidentally, reminds us of Edvard Munch's famous visual depiction of angst and frustration, *The Scream*, another key image of modernism.

If the film uses the characters as a form of representing classes and ideologies, it also constantly draws the viewer's attention to the way that history is experienced and understood. The character of Rose, who tells the story to the excavation crew about the experiences of the past, is the lived mediation between history and current life. She is the only character operating in both temporal moments during the entire film. She represents continuity throughout time, while her granddaughter serves as a reminder of the future. Her granddaughter's possible romance with Brock Lovitt, the commander of the excavation crew, left hanging at the end of the film, keeps alive the promise of the kind of transcendent love that was destroyed by the tragedy of the wreck, and the physical destruction of one of the lovers.

The film's temporal shifts also serve to call into question the constructed nature of the traditional narratives about the *Titanic* and the nature of historical knowledge. The documentary-like opening of the film may be real footage or it may be a simulation; the audience cannot know for sure. There is also an uncertainty about the real meaning and significance of the events of the sinking even though this tale has been told many times. Brock and his crew, who operate in our time, think they know everything about the experience; they believe that its lessons have been absorbed, and that it is safely in the past. Their knowledge is based upon the historical narrative they believe they have mastered and the scientific equipment they employ. But the film leaves no doubt about how mistaken they are, until the very end. The present day crew's arrogance in their technologically mediated knowledge and the economic motivations of the excavation reproduce the original ideology of the maiden cruise. This is exposed through Rose's narrative. When Louis, a member of the excavation crew, demonstrates the sinking of the *Titanic* through a computer simulation he is told by Rose: "Thank you for the fine forensic analysis, Mr. Boudin. Of course, the experience of it was somewhat different." The crew that seems like a group of cocky adolescent video-game players have at their disposal advanced helicopters (which bring the older Rose to the scene), underwater robotic machinery, and an enormous unfamiliar technical apparatus. Yet, all this technology fails to unearth the true secrets of the *Titanic*, to place the events in a meaningful human context, or even to discover the mystery of the missing diamond. This diamond, Rose's engagement necklace, appropriately named the "Heart of the Ocean," is the real reason for the expedition. The entire exploration, transpiring in current time, is about recovering the diamond, for the

investors backing the excavation. The audience is reminded of this in the early scene in which Brock has to reassure his investors over the phone of his coming success in reclaiming the diamond.

The diamond is a real example of, and at the same time symbolically represents, commodity fetishism. The value placed on the commodity has generated the return voyage to the wreck of the *Titanic*, which parallels the greed that led to the carelessness before the original sinking. The film offers a critique of the recurring problem of placing a higher value on the object than the people involved. The frameworks of both voyages are misguided but the characters in the film's real-time frame come to a belated awareness of their mistaken blindness. Near the end of the film, Brock Lovitt, explains to Rose's granddaughter: "Three years I thought of nothing but the Titanic, but I never got it, I never let it in," expressing a recognition that he has been transformed by Rose's story of death and destruction. The original voyage was perceived as a moneymaking venture and even in its revisiting through the excavation, the significance of the human tragedy has been forgotten a second time. To further emphasize this point the scene shifts to young Rose finding the diamond after surviving the disaster. It is in her coat, placed there by Cal, her bourgeois fiancé who never believed in the possibility that he could lose it because of his certainty that she would remain with him due to his wealth and power. Immediately the scene shifts to the present and we see Rose, as an old woman in the present time, toss the much-valued diamond into the sea as a clear rejection of the diamond's status as the priceless object that can buy her. Then, at the very end of the film, the camera shows us Rose's dream. In her mind, an image remains in which Jack and Rose are reunited to the applause of the entire ship. The regal ballroom reserved for the rich is open to all the classes and all the passengers. The audience created around the dancing couple mingles the disparate social groups, presenting a vision of a classless society in which human values have triumphed over the distinctions of status and wealth associated with capitalism. How this state was arrived at is left unexplained but we must remember this is transpiring in the unreal temporality of dreaming. However unreal, it signifies a hidden desire and therefore allows us to at least glimpse at a possible reconciliation of the film's contradictions and our historical contradictions. The real "Heart of the Ocean" has been discovered and kept alive through the human narrative and perspective given by Rose, despite the abundance of futuristic technology available. It is in this sense, that class divisions are critiqued and an alternative is imaginatively pictured.

There is more that must be said about how the film functions. There are various allegorical figures employed in the film that must be traced. The ship itself becomes a floating metaphor for capitalist society as a whole, with its various levels and strata. The diamond comes to symbolize the illusory nature of value in a commodified world where the solid and material can be strangely elusive. And the various characters can be seen as social types or ideological positions. In these ways representation of the social totality can be accomplished. The whole can be imagined. But this still leaves open the question of the significance of this image given. What is the film symptomatic about? Does the class figuration point, as Jameson surmised, to the resurgence of traditional class struggle? Is the audience pointed toward the necessity to think about new and different social possibilities? Does the film suggest a desire, perhaps repressed, for a new kind of future? Can we still think about history using categories of thought developed during earlier moments of greater optimism, or are we blocked from the possibility of meaningful, qualitative social progress? Will our postmodern present remain as the final triumph of human history and development?

Of course, no film can definitively settle these questions. But if we want to consider the possibility of the film and its popularity as providing us with certain knowledge about the world, then

another key aspect of the film must be discussed. We need to consider the film's underlying genre with its own dynamics. Although the film contains elements of several traditional genres including the romance, and the historical epic, the majority of the viewing time consists in drawn-out scenes of the sinking. There is a veritable orgy of death and destruction that goes on in graphic detail. Why? It has already been suggested that this is included to build suspense. But, as a genre this suggests the horror or disaster film. Of course, there has been a long history of disaster films, although they have rarely received the commercial success of this one, if we place it in that genre. As a group, disaster films seem to be somewhat secondary to the mainstream moviegoer's usual cinematic experience. There has been an intensification of them recently with *Armageddon*, *Deep Impact*, *Independence Day*, *Volcano*, and *Twister* among others, and they seem to intertwine with conspiracy films and general apocalypse themes as the millennium approaches. But none have attained the popularity of *Titanic*.

The features of *Titanic* seem to comprise a discourse of indestructibility, power, permanence, and stability, combined with the undermining of this discourse through horrific depictions of destruction. This unsinkable ship, full of force and power, technology and progress, seems invulnerable as it pushes forward along the ocean's surface with speeds and ease previously unknown. However, the appearance turns out to contain its own negation, the depths of the ship are not as stable and crisis-free as surface appearances lead us to believe. Under the surface, beneath the visible, a hidden contradiction looms. The powerful iceberg, which the ship's leaders received warnings of and should have anticipated, breaks through the mighty hull and brings this enormous edifice to its inevitable sinking. Even after this process has begun, the leaders of the ship, and by extension, society at large, cannot really believe the truth of the situation, that something has gone horribly wrong. The ship can easily be read as a metaphor or image of capitalist society as a whole, in which, as it appears in its fullest glory, plowing ahead at unheard of speeds, there is something threatening up ahead. As the film moves in time, it seems to want to force the audience to remain in the present. This can suggest the parallel between the discourse of permanence then and the situation now. In this sense, it reminds the viewer that our current moment may also not be so permanent as appearances would suggest.

Therein lies the clue for the film's broad appeal. The viewers get a sense of pleasure from viewing the destruction as a kind of desire to see the "end of the world as we know it." Its interest resides, at least partially, in the depiction of a situation in which it becomes possible to conceptualize something different. Its ending with the reconciliation of the classes can only take place after a ruthless critique and negation of all that exists. Yet, in the final analysis it presents a vision of what may come. There is recognition and a hope that just because the rigid structure of our daily lives appears eternal and beyond history, this does not mean that nothing is taking place beneath the surface. It can also challenge us to think more sharply about our responsibility to the future. The job of the social critic is not to continue to lament the power of the moment or to worship the accomplished fact, but is instead to probe beneath the surface, to warn the crew of the approaching danger, and to organize the lower decks to prepare the future. In this sense, *Titanic* offers a largely discarded vision of history, it champions neglected values of compassion and solidarity, and is a hopeful film.

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Raising "Film Avid"

The Happy Teen from Technotown

by Graeme Harper

The "Film Avid", conceived by its eager parents, TV and its partner, the global film and media industries, is an infant of the closing years of the millennium, a voracious late twentieth-century baby. The Film Avid is both the result of over one hundred years of cinema ancestry and of the rise of new and pervasive technologies of film and media distribution. The birth of Film Avid today is challenging notions of national cinema, of film industry dominance and of film consumption in the late twentieth century.

The term "Film Avid" is used to refer to that part of the contemporary film audience that go to the cinema at least once a week, buy 40% of all cinema tickets and who are predominantly in the age range 15-24 years.¹ This Film Avid audience, though largely generated by Western cinematic traditions, is global and has, over a period of around forty years, developed its own filmic "neighbourhoods" or "non-geographic" communities (communities of *Star Wars* [1977] enthusiasts, for example, or web-neighbourhoods of Leonardo DiCaprio fans) and its own set of textual criteria; for example, a preference for fast-paced, quirky narratives with popular music soundtracks.

The birth of the Film Avid audience is the force behind the "youthification" of cinema, the current thematic state of the Hollywood film industry, and the relationship between contemporary film production and new film distribution technologies such as the Digital Video Disk (DVD) or Digital Versatile Disk as it is also called. The position of this audience in both American and non-American cinema culture is hegemonic. In other words, it is not simply the hegemony of the Hollywood film industry which this audience promotes but, in essence, of one audience type: an audience born into the cine-literate and visually responsive world of the post-1950s.

Though more "down market" a social group than the average novel buyer or theatre goer, the Film Avid is, paradoxically, often more wealthy.² This paradox reflects the style of this new audience: this is mass media *nouveau riche*, not necessarily members of what we might call (in a nineteenth century sense) the middle class but using consumption practices reflecting certain "privileged" spending priorities (of which cinema-going is indicative).

The Film Avid audience is the result of the globalisation of the media (in which, historically, terrestrial TV was once at the forefront and is now making way for the web-linked PC), of mass consumerism (in which products and purchasing provide pleasure and satisfaction in ways never before imagined), and of a financially buoyant and decidedly Imperialist Western culture.

In an advanced Western society to be part of an audience has unequivocally come to mean being part of a mass media audience. It is still possible, of course, to be part of the local audience for an opera, or the audience for a poetry reading or

the audience for a play. But because of the pervasiveness of the mass media our understanding of what an audience is and what it does is gauged by criteria laid down by media-driven perceptions.

The best example of this is how we have come to view audience size and audience culture. If it were noted, for example, that the U.S. audience for yesterday's broadcast of a popular TV soap opera was 9.8 million people, but the U.S. audience for a non-American movie in the week of its American release was 4.3 million, no one would find these figures unusual and almost everyone would rightly make certain assumptions about the American audience's cultural and creative perceptions.

In the contemporary Western world knowledge about media audience types and media audience sizes is general knowledge. The very big difference between this and knowledge of the poetry audience or play audience is, of course, that this understanding has never once been based on an actual sighting of the 9.8 million soap opera watchers or 4.3 million movie watchers, but on a detached interpretation of the film or programme itself. Contemporary media literacy equally means media audience literacy and, unlike other performance "literacies", sheer size and scale of the distribution system precludes the "sighting" and empirical confirmation of assumptions; instead, Westerners use shared theoretical models built up since the expansion of the mass media in the late 1950s to categorise and deconstruct these figures.

Because of this, the contemporary film audience is an audience that makes critical judgements based on metaphysical

rather than physical representations, on assumptions based on individualistic rather than holistic evidence, and on transcendent secondary evidence rather than material primary evidence. That is, they use the media as a source of knowledge acquisition and, in the integrated way of the film and media industries, this source is often promoting its own product. Most significantly, the primary consumers of the broadcast media are also members of the Film Avid group.

It is worth noting that, as rapid advances in digital projection technology suggest that cinema performances will very shortly be "virtually" broadcast rather than "physically" screened it is no leap of imagination to link an upbringing in the global audience cultures of the TV and PC to the way judgements about films are increasingly becoming judgements of the Film Avid type. Likewise, the arrival of multi-subtitled DVD as the premiere domestic film viewing format has combined knowledge acquisition with entertainment in a way that the video cassette never could through the use of supplementary platforms and interactive viewing menus. These developments reflect a change in both the relationship between "high art" and "low art" brought about by the popular media, an increase in general community awareness of film and the desire for more knowledge about it, and new perceptions about what equals "local", "regional" or "national" culture.

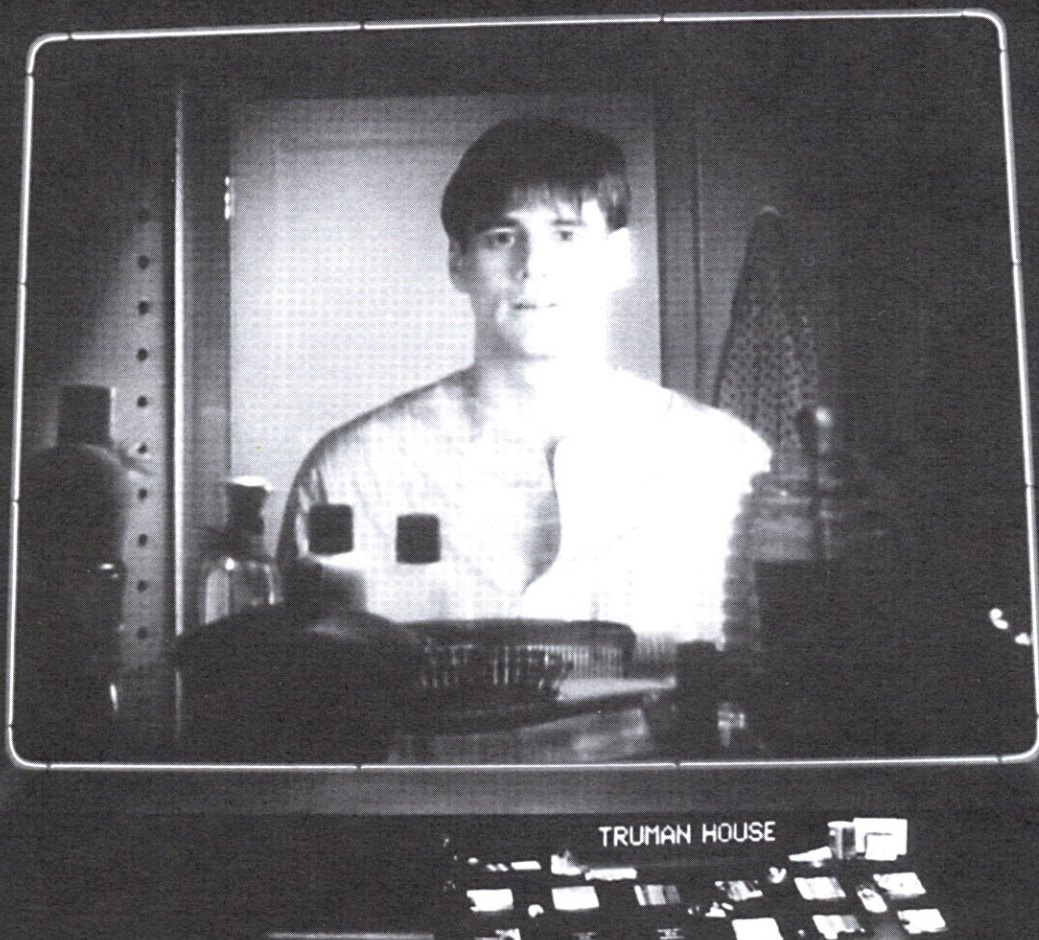
The contemporary filmgoer makes confident cultural assump-

1 Martin Dale, *The Movie Game: The Film Business in Britain, Europe and America* (London: Cassell, 1997), p. 6.

2 Ibid.

ON AIR

The Truman Show, 1998



tions about who will be the audience for any given film, they categorise them according to a relatively fixed idea of what genre these films belong to (genre definitions they are introduced to largely by popular film criticism presented in TV shows and press publications), and they don't necessarily link a pre-1950s sense of aesthetic quality with the notion of popularity. To put it plainly: popular mass media, developing since the late 1950s, has changed the Western conception of what is suitable entertainment, or appropriate communication, or useful information, for the persons we consider ourselves to be; persons who have a local cultural and geographic identity but also a global filmographic sense.

So, if you are a member of a film audience born since the 1950s, you have most likely experienced no other audience response than that influenced by the TV and, latterly, the PC. You have been fed by the globalisation of film culture in which Hollywood film and its structural and thematic criteria have been hegemonic. You are, statistically, the reason for Hollywood's global success. Yet, as a Film Avid, born into a world increasingly dependent on the media for both entertainment and knowledge, you are not only Hollywood's child, you are its parent.

It is the Avid who has nurtured the making of films that only a teleological machine such as Hollywood, tuned to both mass film production and mass distribution, can provide. This Avid "nurturing" has produced such phenomenon as: the development of styles of screenwriting which can support mass production; the building of cinemas which encourage a variety of audience responses based on consumer choice (in other words, the construction of multiplexes); the increased power of the "non-studio" film star whose commodity status is a safety net for commercial success; the rapid turnover of film product in order to feed a hedonistic youthful consumer requiring constantly

renewed sources of satisfaction; the development of interactive film technology (DVD as a recent prime example) combining aspects of film "epistemology" with firm film "ontologies" in which the viewpoints of the cinema are an accepted part of existence.

This then is the world the Film Avid. Specific effects brought about by the Avid's birth are even more intriguing. The debate on the level of contemporary film aesthetics and cultural hegemony is, perhaps, the most controversial.

Film is an artform, unique in our time, in being able to encompass all other artforms without altering its overarching aesthetic. In that sense it has proven itself to be a permeable medium, an open medium, associated with what Mikhail Bakhtin once called a "hearing"³ culture, a transcendent culture. It is not, and cannot be, self-sufficient. It cannot give primacy to one aspect of itself over another without altering its aesthetic shape. It is an eclectic and integrated art form with an equally eclectic and largely integrated production and distribution profile. But this is only half the picture.

It is inaccurate, of course, to view artforms simply as *products* of a culture or of cultural change. We must also view them as *producers* of culture and cultural change. In that way, it is not unreasonable to see filmic discourse as the primary metaphor for contemporary, or postmodern, Western consciousness. There is strong evidence in support of this.

The tenets of Postmodernism are fundamentally filmic. For example: the eclecticism, the (montage-like) techniques of *bricolage*, the frequent paradigm shifts (or genre evolutions), the parodies and pastiches, the relativism (sense of camera point-of-view), the aspects of play and so on. And Postmodernism is, without doubt, a post-fifties Western phenomenon.

Film, as the *ur-text* or origin text of much Film Avid cultural

Contact, 1997





Scream, 1996

meaning, has presented at its core a number of significant ontological and aesthetic positions. Firstly, it has promoted the interaction of individuals with one another, and the celebration of the individual largely exemplified in the celebration of directors and film stars. Like the promotion of individual identities and voices within the paradigm of the postmodern, so film has allowed for the individualism of audience members to be asserted in conjunction with the audiences' collective shape and character. This is an artform which fits perfectly with the striving for personal identity which the discourses of Postmodernism have suggested as a remedy for the anti-humanism of Modernism.

Secondly, our century of film has both democratised and increased the reach of dramatic and performative representation; democratised, on the one hand, by moving the distribution space for performance away from old and fixed geographic, cultural or class locations and making them transcendent. It is no surprise that the Film Avid is paradoxically both of a lower socio-economic class than the average theatre-goer and more educationally privileged (increasingly, it must be said, being at least college educated in film).

Democratised, on the other hand, because it is true to say that a filmgoer can choose the geographic origin of the films they watch. For example, a Canadian can choose to favour American or British produced films over local, Canadian films. Though a counter argument might suggest that the market power of Hollywood has actually reduced audience choice, it cannot be denied that within a capitalist mode of production economic and social survival is directly attached to creating renewable consumer desire. Hollywood has been most successful in doing just that. But there's more to this and the question must be asked, considering the way in which the notion of "neighbourhood" and "region" have been changed by media globalization, whether the reach of film as an artform has fundamentally challenged previous notions of what constitutes a "national cinema" in an industrial and aesthetic setting that can now rightly be called "transnational".

The fourth ontological effect that the birth of the Film Avid has

heralded is related to verisimilitude. Film is largely committed to the appearance of being either, or both, true and real (what André Bazin discussed when talking about presence⁴), yet it equally attempts to hide its performative elements. During the twentieth century we have become inculcated in a film discourse in which the distance between staged performance and recorded actuality has substantially narrowed. What this means for the Avid is that film is accepted as an increasingly parodic and carnivalesque artform, festive, popular, spectacular and abstract, which has increasingly made these things part of verisimilitude itself.

So, for example, the recent *Scream* (1996) franchise, penned by Kevin Williamson, and the equally parodic *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (1997), *The Faculty* (1998) and, most significantly, *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), are prime examples of the ways in which film has become increasingly self-referential and carnivalesque (in the sense Bakhtin considered the carnival: as a site of polyglossia, encouraging the breakdown of hierarchies, stimulating the creation of new languages, accentuating familiar, even bawdy or grotesque exhibition).

This is not simply a 1990s phenomenon. The action film cycles of the late 1970s and 1980s, the *Terminator* (1984) franchise, *Rocky* (1976) and *Rambo* (1987), with their iconic comic book characters and mythic narratives represented a "non-reality" which Film Avids were quick to accept. So, likewise, did the emerging youth "cult films"⁵ of the 1960s and 1970s, films such as *Easy Rider* (1969), *Rollerball* (1975) and *Enter the Dragon* (1973) by virtue of its distribution focus, which relied on the acceptance of a new role for cinema in which politically, culturally or philosophically complex issues could be housed in the decidedly youth-driven narratives, characters and *mise-en-scène* of popular

3 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 15.

4 Presence, in this respect, meaning to suggest that the viewer is in the same temporal and spatial arena as the film itself. See Hugh Gray (ed) *What is Cinema? I* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967) & *What is Cinema II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971).

5 For readings on the nature of cult film see Graeme Harper & Xavier Mendicks. *Unruly Pleasures: Cult Film and Its Critics* (London: FAB, 1999).

late twentieth century Hollywood cinema. As the Avid culture emerged from the pre-television days of the 1950s so film emerged from the "high art" aesthetics of literature and theatre. Driven by the "youthification", which the post-war baby boom and suburbanisation encouraged, film played a major role in a new understanding of cultural ritual and performance as popular spectacle.

For the Film Avid, this has worked *from* film *back* into culture. That is: so many "traditional" regional and national rituals have become, on a *material* level, no more than detached performances with little relationship to the actuality of cultural life in those regions and nations. The secularisation of Western culture, for example, has reduced the meaningfulness of numerous Christian traditions. Added to this, are the results of the spread of Western culture into the non-Western world in the opening centuries of Modernity; so, for example, there is the strange hybrid of a traditional plum-pudding Christmas in the stifling summer heat of Australia, or the performance of "marriage" ceremonies by civil celebrants using personalised, secular and non-canonical "vows". This meld between ritualistic performance and reality in contemporary Western society is something cultural critics such as Jean Baudrillard have simply listed as a component of the postmodern, what Baudrillard considers to be the Disneyland approach to reality, or hyperreality.⁶ For those interested in the history of film, however, what makes this more than merely another point on a postmodernist critic's checklist of the hyper-real is the character of late twentieth century film itself.

Increasingly technologically complex, contemporary film counteracts accusations of being a slave to the "science" of film, or the "technology" of computer generated imagery, by emphasising the playfulness we associate with Humanism. It is no surprise, therefore, to find that the comedy, the romantic comedy and even the quick-witted parodic character in the action thriller (à la Bruce Willis, Will Smith, to some extent Harrison Ford) is in vogue in Hollywood. Even an Avid-pitched cycle as strong on creating a "logical" alternative universe as *Star Trek* cannot resist undercutting this. In *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home* (1986), for example, Mr Spock/Leonard Nimoy and Captain Kirk/William Shatner offer a parodic turn bordering on farce. When Mr Spock silences a noisy commuter using his Vulcan "pinch", it seems to suggest that a power which began in the cycle as an indicator of Spock's potential for unfathomable alien behaviour has become here a kind of schoolboy's trick. Similarly, the Chandleresque rabbit 'toon of *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* (1988) leaves no doubt as to how far contemporary audiences are prepared to collude with film's version of verisimilitude.

Writing in the second edition of his seminal *Film As Social Practice*, Graeme Turner has noted rightly that: "film is a social practice for its makers and its audience; in its narratives and meanings we can locate evidence of the ways in which our culture makes sense of itself."⁷ The social practice, however, is aesthetically and materially now neither historical nor national, at least not in the sense that we have previously understood these terms.

In its one hundred year history, film has proven itself to be *anti-historical* by being a "now" medium, an artform concerned with "seeing things as they happen." Likewise, the production and distribution requirements of contemporary film frequently reiterate that it has also turned out to be *anti-national*. This is supported by arguments concerning the changing state of "nationhood", as Albert Moran points out:

The argument then can be briefly recapped. There is no such thing as a 'national cinema', if the phrase is used to designate a single, unitary object. National populations are marked by a multiplicity of culture communities to which individuals belong in varying degrees: there is no such thing as a single national cultural identity.⁸

At very least then, the Film Avid has experienced film as more anti-national than national. Technologically, as it is crewed, financed and distributed, film has transgressed Modernist notions of geographic containment. It has also transgressed notions of textual containment.

The fact that recent Hollywood films such as *Scream*, *The Truman Show* (1998) and *Contact* (1997) can be viewed in a variety of geographic locations, in competition with locally or regionally produced film, is certainly one part of the picture. But they are also intertextual, or textually "open" films (*Scream* is about film genre, *The Truman Show* is about television and *Contact* makes direct reference to Sigourney Weaver's *Alien* [1979]cycle). They are also films about communication, and it is the way that communication has become transnational and intertextual, particularly in relation to the media, that asks us to consider whether Modernist notions of national culture still hold up against film's now established mode of communication. Film Avids, with their global consumer communities, have fuelled this debate.

In the UK, in the week ending September 20, 1998, 13 of the top 15 grossing films were popular American films. In the same week, 8 of the top 10 films in Spain were popular American films, 9 of the top 10 in the Netherlands, 10 of the top 15 in Japan and 12 of the top 15 in Germany. Of video rentals, 10 of the top 10 in Brazil were popular American films, 9 of the top 10 in Japan, 9 of the top 10 in Mexico and 10 of the top 10 in Australia.⁹ This is a date picked at random, but the results would be almost identical in any week in any recent year. This could be viewed as cultural imperialism. However, two things are important here.

Firstly, that to view these figures as examples of overarching cultural imperialism downplays the strength of individual human agency and the ability of individuals to make a choice. As there is no doubt that Film Avids in particular have participated in the creation of non-geographic media neighbourhoods and consumption led global consumerism, it would seem untenable to suggest that audience choice has been entirely a matter of cultural imperialism.

Secondly, as film has shown itself to be a permeable medium, it is possible to argue that these films are not American films in the sense that a nineteenth century notion of national culture would define them. Their metaphysics are transcendent. They are, in a metaphysical sense, thematically, aesthetically and socially global. Even then, the situation in the late twentieth century is not entirely clear cut.

In the European domestic market, for example, where numerous countries produce their domestic film and broadcast products, the most successful TV fiction programming strategy has been to programme local sitcoms and serials with imported American movies.¹⁰ For example, the Bill Paxton and Helen Hunt film *Twister* (1996) was the fourth most popular single event on Italian TV between April 1999 and May 1999. It was the only film in the Italian top ten. In France, however, in the same period, two films, both of French origin, appeared in the top ten. Moreover, there were no films in the top ten in the UK; instead, the top eight places were taken by serials.¹¹ As it is the domestication of film through the technologies of television that has given birth to the Film Avid, this fluid melding of local fiction and imported fiction points to a consumer characteristic that digital broadcasting is now further exploiting. That is: the willingness and ability of Film Avids to consume media under a rubric of cultural eclecticism.

It is not unexpected that in one hundred years of cinema history film's obvious structural properties of "joining", "interspersing" and "overlying" have colluded in the replacing of nineteenth century exclusivist notions of nation and culture. Film as a communication medium has never been suited to the role of maintaining monologic, self-sufficient versions of culture. Yet, it

is only in recent years that the revolution launched, in fact, by Einstein's theories of relativity at the beginning of film history has impacted on film audiences. Mass communication, simultaneous "transmission" through the PC, rapid transport, all have built on Einstein's discourses of kinetics to challenge the compartmentalising of text or culture. And cinema, as the pre-eminent twentieth century artform, has been the vehicle for much of this. For the Film Avid, whose primary source of representation is visual representation, this anti-historical and transnational element has proven even more profound.

Visual representation is naturally generative. Whereas in linguistic representation elements are learned piece by piece (or word by word), in visual representation learning takes place in its entirety. Because of this, visual systems of representation are much less conventional than linguistic systems.¹² No surprise then that the Film Avid audience is supportive of the *bricolage*, pastiche and parodic elements of contemporary film. More controversially, as Flint Schier has suggested, a naturally generative artform is far closer to our day-to-day recognitional abilities than one that is relatively closed. In other words, the visual representations of film have some claim to be superior to the linguistic representations of the book. The arrival of digital film production and distribution technology has taken this shift even further.

We are entering a period in which the medium of transfer-wwwence and distribution of films is about to be both centralised and domesticated. Gone will be variations in print quality, variations in performance or those simple programming difficulties of physically transporting single film prints. Indeed today, digital video systems have become so sophisticated and flexible that the difference in output between film and video has become increasingly marginal. For the Film Avid the difference in recording and transferring values between film and video is largely consequential. The Avids' acceptance is, in very large part, due to their inculcation in the production values of television; while the Avids' ability to recognise and contextualise differing production values is part of their cine-literate nature. The great success of one recent film exploiting this cine-literacy, *The Blair Witch Project*, is an indication of just how significant the Avid "vote" can be. Needless to say, the recent arrival of DVD, which further domesticates film process, has added even more weight to Avid consumer power.

Historically, despite the birth of the computer in 1942 and the growth in the TV-literate population in the 1960s, it has been only in the last fifteen years that a general paradigm shift away from what we might call a "mechanical" society to an "electronic" society has occurred. This is the result of the historical coming together of the launch of two digital technologies: compact disc in 1983 and the Apple Mac personal computer with mouse in 1984. Both these products targeted the domestic consumer market in a way which was consumer-friendly as much as it was mass producer driven. Similarly, digital technology, through media convergence or the coming together of the personal computer and the television, has fed the Film Avid generation by playing to demands for visual not linguistic representation.

DVD, in that respect, is perfectly pitched to the 40% of film audiences who are Film Avids. More than simply a replacement for the video cassette, DVD shows a narrowing of what can be called "the band width" of production and a widening of the "band-width" of consumption. That is, a decreased emphasis on differentiation at the *point of production* and an increased emphasis at the *point of reception*.

DVD is fast, smooth, slick, non-linear. It has sold itself on its "information" storage capacity (noting *information* not entertainment value as consumer magazine *What DVD?* indicates: "Yep, all the way up to a pretty mind-boggling 17 gigabytes on a dual layered, double sided disc. That's one hell of a lot of information."¹³ And it has sold itself even more so on its interactivity and its epistemological contributions (that is: supplementary

materials give simple, domestic access to increased film knowledge).

A postmodern distribution medium then: designed so that interaction allows individualisation and, because of this, the audience feels involved. This encourages personal appropriation. These feelings of personal appropriation make for a potent consumer product. With DVD what Film Avids have increasingly demanded (their final appropriation of the pre-eminent twentieth century artform) becomes fact.

Like the incredible market impact of stereophonic sound equipment in the 1970s, which was driven by youth culture demands for higher range equipment on which to play pop music, DVD meets the needs of the greatest number of film consumers. Yet it has also made it possible, through its supplementary and platform design, to reference the globalisation of media generally.

Through its language, subtitle and supplementary platforms DVD can increase the "regional" market potential of a "global" film, or to make a regional film into a global text. DVD also has met mass consumer demand for newness and novelty by being based on an interaction between a core film text and a set of creatively incorporated extras. As Colin Campbell points out: "since the gap between the real and the imagined can never actually be closed...consumption of the novel serves to create a need to consume more novelty."¹⁴ Because film locates itself in the space between filmed reality and constructed fiction Campbell's point is poignant.

With DVD, novelty lies no longer just in the core film text but, in the long term, can be found in the additional materials and how they relate back to the core. Like changing the tyres on your car, buying a new pair of jeans, or going on holidays to a new location, the core idea remains largely fixed (director's cuts and remastering notwithstanding) but the novelty of the consumer package is infinitely repeatable.

To witness the launch of DVD in the closing years of the century is an indication of just how much film has travelled from its origins in Victorian leisure-time activities, its fixed locales, its mechanical technologies, its "mysteries", towards being the consumer product of an informed and youthful mass market. Naturally, the journey has not been monologic. But as we have witnessed to the greater part the fall of alternative political and social systems, it is true to say that film has been a relatively willing partner in the successful aesthetics of late modern capitalism. That being said, there can be no doubt that for those born since 1950, film culture is as varied and as self-affirming as literary culture has long been.

6 Jean Baudrillard, *The Evil Demon of Images* (Sydney: Power Institute, 1981), p. 14-15.

7 Graeme Turner, *Film As Social Practice*, 2nd edition (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 3.

8 Albert Moran ed. *Film Policy: International, National and Regional Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 10.

9 GECA, *European TV* (Madrid: TVBS, 1999).

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Flint Schier, *Deeper into Pictures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 186.

13 *What DVD?* Issue 1, December 1998 (Bath: Future Publishing, 1998), p. 11.

14 Colin Campbell, "The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism: reflections on the reception of a thesis concerning the origin of the continuing desire for goods" in Susan M Pearce ed. *Experiencing Material Culture in the Western World* (London: Leicester University Press, 1997), p. 38.

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Cinema by Fits and Starts

New Zealand Film Practices in the Twentieth Century

by David Gerstner and Sarah Greenlees

Hence, the man on the frontier is seeking a new identity. Violence and experiment are thus inevitable. Make it new.¹

Introduction

Former executive director of the New Zealand Film Commission (1983-1988), Jim Booth, suggests that "cinematograph expressions particular to New Zealand..." are essential to generating income because this national expression will "do much to announce the existence of New Zealand to the world at large."² Barry Grant in fact identifies 1994 as "the year that New Zealand cinema established itself in the consciousness of North American film-goers."³ He is right to the extent that in 1994 New Zealand feature film left the limited scope of North American art-house venues (as well as the historically exported news-reel-type genre) into more mainstream visibility. Academy Award winner, *The Piano* (1993) and *Once Were Warriors* (1994) made their way into North American parlance, but their economic viability still remained questionable for the New Zealand film industry.⁴

Indeed, this is the crux of an historical key concern of New Zealand filmmakers: how can the New Zealand film industry simultaneously make films that indelibly mark a certain *New Zealandness* for a domestic and international market, while making a financial profit both at home and overseas? More importantly, what are the conditions that define this national and international profitability or what some have recently termed, "cultural capital"?⁵ In what way does the concern for overseas acceptance serve to delineate the terms under which a consecrated New Zealand film canon emerges? Finally, what are the ways in which New Zealanders creatively negotiate their cultural anxieties over the Americanization/Hollywoodization of national identity? While these anxieties are nothing new on the world scene, it is perhaps this anxiety itself that is the aesthetic *sine qua non* of New Zealand's national identity in relationship to its filmmaking practices. We will demonstrate that there is indeed a national set of film practices that has developed through a series of historical fits and starts.⁶

1 Marshall McLuhan, *Culture is Our Business*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970), 44. We'd like to thank Thierry Jutel, Suzanne Nixon, and Russel Campbell for the editorial suggestions.

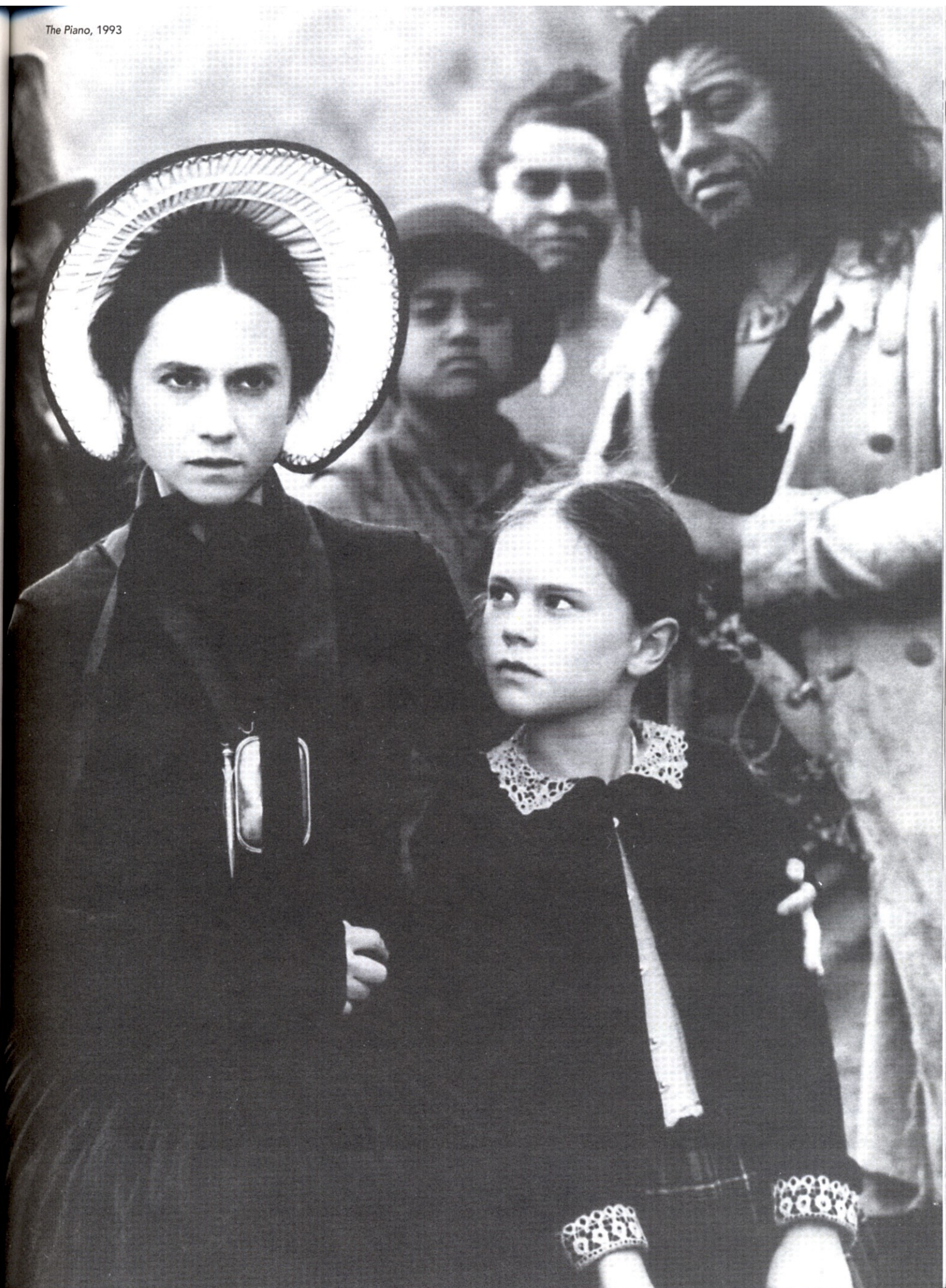
2 Quoted in Gregory A. Waller, "The New Zealand Film Commission: Promoting an Industry, Forging a National Identity," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 16, no. 2 (1996): 246.

3 Barry Grant, "Heavenly Creatures," *New Zealand Journal of Media Studies*, 1, no. 2 (1994): 28.

4 This is especially true since *The Piano* is a multi-national enterprise; the film received funding from France, Australia, and not New Zealand. Jane Campion, the film's director, is claimed by both New Zealand and Australia. *Once Were Warriors*, however, is the highest grossing film for the domestic market.

5 The New Zealand Film Commission recently hired the Law and Economics Consulting Group, Ltd. to clarify the value of filmmaking in the service of a strong national culture. The upshot of the study is a report that is soon to be submitted to government; George R. Barker, "Cultural Capital and Policy" (unpublished report for the New Zealand Film Commission, Wellington, June 1999).

6 The limitations of such a project are obvious. Our goal here is to survey a wide and diverse history of filmmaking while underscoring key discourses that, as we see it, have recurred over the past one hundred years.





Once Were Warriors, 1994

Historical Context for Filmmaking in Aotearoa, New Zealand

New Zealand's current dilemma in the face of a rapidly changing world economy (and not a dilemma only reserved for its film industry) is its population, size, and geographical location. While it is true that New Zealand's economy (under Protectionist and Social Welfare schemes during the early and mid-part of the century) was self-sustaining, the international pressure to open New Zealand's markets after World War II has had drastic social and psychological impact on the country.

Through the 1960s and early 1970s New Zealand depended especially upon Britain for its economic survival. According to Jane Kelsey, when Britain "sought more fertile pastures within the European Economic Community" New Zealand's "protected, state-centered, vulnerable agricultural economy was set adrift."⁷ 1984 is generally considered the year that a radical "New Zealand Experiment" begins. With the loss of England as a major trading partner and a series of traumatic oil shocks in the 1970s, the government desperately, if not over-determinedly, set out to restructure the economic framework of the social welfare state that had been implemented under the 1930s Labour Government. The most astonishing aspect of the economic turn-around in the 1980s was its initiation by the very political party that had put the Social Welfare State into existence in the first place.

The perceived paternalistic beneficence of New Zealand's Labour Party took a sudden shift as it opened the floodgates to multi-national ownership of once state-owned industries and natural resources. The multi-nationals came, opened administrative offices throughout the country, yet they neglected to provide a stable production base in the economy. In effect, New Zealand

runs the risk of becoming more a consumer society and less a production society. While the country has always relied on imports for a good deal of their industrial products (movies being one of the prominent cultural and technological imports), importation has magnified considerably leaving New Zealand in a precarious economic situation.⁸

Early Cinema and New Zealand Enthusiasm

New Zealand, like the rest of the world, shared a similar set of events in cinematic history. The country saw its first projected image in 1896, viewed Pathé's stencil-colored "scenes" of its own landscape (*Coasts of New Zealand*, 1910), attended 1500 seat Picture Palaces as early as 1910, made its first feature film (*Hinemoa*, now considered lost) in 1914, and heard sound with film by 1928. Between 1900 and 1978, however, New Zealand only produced a handful of feature films.⁹

In 1896, New Zealand enthusiastically and relatively quickly, ushered in the era of the projected image. The four major urban centers (Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin) were introduced to "the rage of London, Paris, and New York" by a multi-national contingent.¹⁰ Edison's Kinematographe was imported into the country by Australian James MacMahon and "Professors" Hausmann and Gow. Domestic exhibitors such as James McDonald (New Zealand Tourist Department), T.J. West and Joseph Perry shot their own local New Zealand moving pictures as the demand for local content grew alongside the images from abroad.¹¹ These local films provided a strategic in-road to an international audience since locally produced New Zealand films were recognized for their exotic and colonial appeal. In

1900, for example, A.H. Whitehouse traveled to France to show his New Zealand "actualities" at the Paris Exhibition.

Unlike other world cinemas, however, New Zealand's enthusiasm could not alone support a strong and prolific film industry. With a population under a million people at the turn of the century (42,113 Maori and 701,101 Pakeha or white settlers), the hope for consistent film production was remote.¹² To this day New Zealand depends upon film imports to supply the nation's film industry's exhibition and distribution arms. Although New Zealand did not achieve a sustained film industry, it nevertheless consistently produced several interesting and well-made feature films, as well as an assortment of documentary and experimental works.

As a country that defines itself by its pioneering and DIY (*Do-it-Yourself*) attitude, film technology fascinated several New Zealanders with some solid, and occasionally distinctive, results. The early "pioneers" of New Zealand filmmaking, Henry Gore, Jack Welsh, A. H. Whitehouse, Edwin Coubray, and Rudall Hayward were the handful of filmmakers that produced films with both local and international audiences in mind.

Some historians position Henry Gore (1882-1967) as New Zealand's first cine-ophile entrepreneur. His romance with the cinematic apparatus and his technical abilities are similar to that of Thomas Edison's cinematic mechanic *cum* filmmaker Edwin S. Porter in the United States (an apposite analogy as we will point out). Around 1905 Gore spent time abroad working on an American assembly line making Simplex projectors. Upon returning to Dunedin, Gore's finances were in persistent turmoil because of his insatiable appetite for the latest in film equipment from overseas.

In many ways, Gore is emblematic of New Zealand's cultural and economic uncertainty regarding its twentieth-century identity (generally speaking, British culture and American economics). With the cinema dramatically altering the terms of cultural heritage around the world, New Zealanders faced further tension regarding their sense of nation. British imperialist culture dominated white-settler's New Zealand heritage (and still does to an extent). Further, the importation of multi-national cinematic cultures and technologies at the end of the nineteenth century—particularly from the United States—troubled the ideological stability of the imperialist enterprise. Thus, Gore's interest in the emerging technology, on the one hand, served to produce a number of pro-Empire films (*Children's Pageant and Living Flag*, 1923) and feature length-scenics of New Zealand (*Glorious New Zealand*, 1925). On the other hand, Gore's admiration of American industrial practices so inscribed his life that he named one of his nine children Koda Edis (certainly an enthusiastic homage to both Edison and the Kodak camera).

The technical (and historical) enthusiasm of the "pioneer" filmmakers in New Zealand carried into the sound period as well. Edwin Coubray and Gore's friend, Jack Welsh, were the entrepreneurs of sound technology. Like Hollywood, but on a smaller scale, the coming of sound for New Zealand was fraught with technical mishap and sly, perhaps even vicious, financial maneuvering.

The emergence of sound was, of course, not inexpensive. The enormous investment made by Hollywood during the 1920s was unthinkable for a country the size of New Zealand. Sound, however, did not escape the fascination of both filmmakers and audiences alike. Once again, New Zealand was forced to import if it was to meet consumer need. The larger exhibitors in urban centers were the only venues that were able to afford the expensive American Western Electric sound-system that was on the market.¹³ But New Zealanders interested in this new technology (such as Coubray and Welsh) also took the initiative to build their own sound-on-film device. These filmmakers had to start from scratch since Hollywood was not forth-

coming with its sound-system secrets.¹⁴

In general, New Zealand's sound era followed other national cinemas' evolution with the technology. The minimal local feature-film and newsreel productions were dominated by the import market which filled out the exhibitor's bill. Both Welsh and Coubray had their hands in newsreel production units (*The Empire de Luxe News*—later *New Zealand Soundscapes* and *New Zealand Radio Films, Ltd./Coubray Tone*) as well as feature-film production. Welsh's success with sound film is, in fact, attributed to some rather shady business dealings that occurred around Coubray's first collaborative feature film production, *Hei Tiki*. Coubray, unfortunately, did not finish his work on the film.

Coubray began making *Hei Tiki* with American director Alexander Markey. Markey was a rather unscrupulous fellow who was initially hired by Universal Studios to direct the film *Under the Southern Cross* (alternately titled, *The Devil's Pit*, 1929).¹⁵ Unable to meet his contractual obligation because of his notorious procrastination, Universal took him off the film. Markey, fascinated by the Maori, decided to stay on in New Zealand to capitalize on America's desire to view far-off exotic places (a money-making endeavor particularly since Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* [1922]).

Markey formed Markey Films Inc. and convinced several New Zealanders to invest money, time, and (in the case of the Maori) cultural artifacts to his film project, *Hei Tiki*.¹⁶ Coubray excitedly jumped at the chance to work on such a film. Tensions apparently ran high throughout production and led to Coubray walking off the set. Markey, furious over this reaction, sold Coubray's sound-on-film system machinery to Jack Welsh (one thinks of the Lee DeForest/Theodore Case dramatics in the United States).¹⁷ The film took several years to complete and was finally released in 1935 without synch sound. Markey used his own

7 Jane Kelsey, *The New Zealand Experiment: a World Model for Structural Adjustment?* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, Bridget Williams Books, 1997), 24.

8 Furthermore, as filmmaker Gaylene Preston points out, New Zealand also exports its filmmaking talent. Interview with Gaylene Preston, "Reflecting Reality," *Film in Aotearoa New Zealand*, eds. Jonathan Dennis and Jan Bieringa (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1992), 170.

9 Between 1914 and 1928, ten feature films were made; between 1948 and 1970 only three feature films were produced. There was, however, a considerable increase in film production in the period between 1977 and 1992 when 63 feature films were produced. See Roger Horrocks, "New Zealand Film History," *Alternative Cinema* (October 1977), 9 and Lauren Quaintance, "Wellywood," *North and South* 156 (March 1999), 54-63; 57 and Waller, 243.

10 From an advertisement in the *New Zealand Herald* (10/14/1896) illustrated by Jonathan Dennis, "A Time Line," *Aotearoa*, 188.

11 For an excellent overview of New Zealand's early cinema see Simon Price, *New Zealand's First Talkies: Early Film-making in Otago and Southland, 1896-1939* (Dunedin: Otago Heritage Books, 1996). See also, Jonathan Dennis, "A Time Line," *Aotearoa*, 183-219. Hear, as well, Dennis', *Voices on Film* audio cassette series, Replay Radio, New Zealand Public Broadcasting Ltd, 1996. This is an informative seven-part program on the history of New Zealand Film.

12 Dennis, "A Time Line," *Aotearoa*, 189. *The New Zealand Official Yearbook* (Wellington, 1900) reports 796, 359 Pakeha in 1900 and 39, 854 Maori counted with the most recent date of 1896.

13 The coming of sound arguably created a situation that dashed the slowly emerging film practices of the silent filmmakers. Not only did production become more expensive, many smaller exhibition venues closed down limiting the venues for local screenings.

14 Price, 33.

15 Dennis, 199.

16 Geoff Steven's documentary, *Adventures in Maoriland: Alexander Markey and the Making of Hei Tiki* (producer John Maynard, Phase Three Films, 1984) gives a very useful account of the Markey/Coubray affair. There is some discrepancy regarding the spelling of Markey's surname. *The New York Times* (F2, (1935): 10, 3, spells the director's name with an "e." Steven's documentary, however, presents an invoice from Markey's Film Company where the name is spelled Markey.

17 For a discussion of the development of the Hollywood sound industry see Eyman, Scott *The Speed of Sound: Hollywood and the Talkie Revolution, 1926-1930* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997).



Good Bye Pork Pie, 1981

voice-over to describe his Hollywood-ized romance between two oppositional Maori tribes.¹⁸

With Coubray's technology in hand, Welsh enhanced the Coubray sound-on-film system and received nationwide accolades for his involvement in New Zealand's first "talkie-films." But for all of Welsh's technical ingenuity, New Zealand's first all-talkie features had some major technical hurdles that were not easily overcome. In many ways, the technical difficulties were no different than Hollywood's early difficulties with sound-film production: microphone placement, extraneous noise from camera motors and dollies, location shooting. While camera blimps and quieter lighting systems gave succor to sound-film production, the sound-stage was the most important source for Hollywood to control wild sound. New Zealand filmmakers were forced to shoot on its diverse locations with indeterminate weather conditions.¹⁹

To make matters worse, Welsh's sound-on-film equipment had major technical limitations. New Zealand's first three sound films (*Down on the Farm*-Lee Hill, 1935; *The Wagon and the Star*-J.W. Pollard, 1936; and *Phar Lap's Son*-A.L. Lewis, 1936—all considered lost) used Jack Welsh's sound equipment for production. As Price states,

this process required the sound-track to remain 45cm ahead of the associated picture negative throughout. In order to ensure the picture matched up with the soundtrack, Welsh and Hill [*Down on the Farm's* director] were forced to leave a minimum pause of three seconds between scenes. Since all

three talkies used the Welshian Sound System every scene in each film ended in a long fade-out or a short period where all action was ceased so that the sound would link to the picture in the next scene.²⁰

New Zealanders were thrilled by their own sound-film production. Despite this, financial limitations prevented industry growth that would keep the New Zealand movie theaters filled. The lure of the Hollywood film, however, was too much to resist. As many film scholars have already demonstrated, Hollywood's economic stronghold and vertically integrated structure saturated the ideological sphere of the United States and the entire world.²¹ New Zealand's predominantly white English-speaking population was no exception to the global-entrenchment project of Planet Hollywood.

A Cinema of "Benevolent Paternalism"

One of the more driven and most prolific New Zealand film directors and producers was Rudall Hayward (b. England, 1900-1974). His carefully scripted films during the 1920s and 1930s are striking for their rich cinematography, stunning tracking shots, and effective use of parallel editing. More importantly, Hayward's key feature films emphasize a central issue in New Zealand cinematic narrative: the political and personal relationship between Maori and Pakeha. Juggling this domestic concern with an eye toward the international market, Hayward stamped "Produced in New Zealand for the World" on his production's title sequences. Hayward's early films were diverse in content. Between

1928 and 1930 Hayward directed and produced twenty-three short films for his comedy series, "Hollywood-on-Tour, Girl of Our Town." Traveling throughout the country, Hayward, using a similar plot device in each film, spotlighted a young woman from the cities and towns of New Zealand. With titles such as *A Daughter of Dunedin*, *A Daughter of Invercargill*, *Winifred of Wanganui*, and *Natalie of Napier* Hayward implemented New Zealand's first star system. Dale Austin, Miss New Zealand of 1927 and an eager starlette, was given the prize of starring in *A Daughter in Dunedin*. She received a contract with MGM.

Rudall Hayward's strongest interest in the cinema rested in the cultural dynamic between Pakeha and Maori. As filmmaker John O'Shea remarks, "Rudall Hayward set a tone of benevolent paternalism in his dramatic films about the Pakeha settler and loyal soldier fighting the brave and often chivalrous Maori."²² In this way, one can't help but think of D.W. Griffith's 'paternalistic' version of America in his portrayal of the relationship between whites and African-Americans. Not only is the paternal/humanist colonial white settler ideology similar to both filmmakers' world-view, but Griffith's cinematic aesthetic and style is directly imported into Hayward's films.²³ Hayward's *The Te Kooti Trail* (1927, silent) and *Rewi's Last Stand* (two versions, 1925 and 1940) are a *tour de force* of Griffith-esque editing techniques, cinematography, and performance.

In many ways, Hayward's films raise a curious point. The content of both Hayward's and Griffith's films (particularly *Intolerance*, 1916) share similar white-colony settler ideologies. They demonstrate the conflictual effects of liberal humanist and hegemonic interests under the rule of Empire. The persistent cultural anxieties over the terms in which nationhood is defined is apparent in these films. While contemporary culture in America might be seen as long-removed from its national ties with Britain, both New Zealand and America during the era of Griffith and Hayward heralded the tenets of white anglo-saxon morality and frontier mythology.

The fiction films and documentaries made during the first forty years of film history in both countries dealt with similar cultural tropes: white settlers confronting the harsh frontier, the courageous development of industrial society, the formation of a social contract with the 'noble savage,' and the righteous fight against and final stamping out of the evil indigenous Other. The pioneer spirit is at the heart of the few films that emerged from New Zealand, just as it is central to Hollywood's key generic cycle of the western. We do not intend to draw over-simplified connections here between New Zealand's and the United States' history of race relations—certainly a topic burdened with complexity. Rather we seek to point out a white-settlers' or pioneer-spirit mentality that is shared and played out in these national cinemas. That *Birth of a Nation* (Griffith, 1915), *The Te Kooti Trail* (Hayward, 1927), and *Birth of New Zealand* (Harrington Reynolds—Australian[!], 1921) present the moral tale of white anglo-saxon nation indicates two countries that hoped to simultaneously forge a new national identity while sustaining, at the



Crush, 1992

18 *The New York Times* reported that *Hei Tiki* was disappointing. Markey's "history of the dwindling race of the Maori" apparently was not distinctive enough for its American audience: "[f]or all the conviction it carries, the picture might as well have been filmed on Staten Island, or in Hollywood" *The New York Times*, *ibid.*

19 One is reminded of Gaston Méliès' comments when he visited New Zealand in 1912: "we're in a foul country, cold, rainy, windy..." Dennis, "A Time Line," *Aotearoa*, 190.

20 Price, 46.

21 See, for example, Roger Horrocks, "Hollywood" in *The American Connection*, ed. Malcolm McKinnon, (Wellington: Allen and Unwin, Port Nicholson Press, 1988), 66-78 and David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

22 John O'Shea, "A Charmed Life," in *Film and Aotearoa New Zealand*, 17.

23 John Ford's relationship to Native Americans in such films as *The Iron Horse* (1924) is obviously relevant to this discussion. Hayward, however, shares a closer cinematic aesthetic with Griffith.

very least, its moral "mother-country" heritage. Hayward and Griffith were both progenitors and avid creative participants of this cultural dictum.²⁴

The Forces of Hollywood and Global Modernity, 1920-1960

"If there is any such thing as a 'New Zealand culture,'" wrote New Zealand's film critic and film censor Gordon Mirams in 1945, "it is to a large extent the creation of Hollywood."²⁵ Miram's fascinating book on the relationship between Hollywood and the New Zealander's movie-going experience resonates with Adornesque pessimism and dry Kiwi witticism. The force with which the Hollywood industry inundated the New Zealand psyche has engaged filmmakers and critics alike since the movies were first shown in Auckland in 1896. But it is not only Hollywood that has deluged New Zealand with its hegemonic aesthetic and lured both artist and audience toward its glittering designs.

Modernist painting and literature of Paris, London, and New York also permeated the creative sensibility of key New Zealand artists. Both painter Frances Hodgkins (1869-1947) and filmmaker Len Lye (1901-1980) invariably turned to the cultural milieus overseas for their creative projects. Aside from sporadic visits, both spent the remainder of their lives outside New Zealand. These artists, like many narrative and documentary filmmakers, are a product of multi-national creative and economic energies.

New Zealander's pleasure/anxiety relationship to the dominant model of filmmaking is (perhaps more than its relationship with the other creative arts) one sided. As New Zealand scholar Roger Horrocks succinctly puts it, "[w]e are not even a gleam in a [Hollywood] producer's eye." This is true only to the extent that Hollywood gladly turns to New Zealand—or any other exotic location—when it best serves their creative and/or economic needs. During the studio era, for example, MGM's *Green Dolphin Street* (1946, Saville) presented Lana Turner in the pioneer atmosphere of Wellington and Dunedin. The film was shot on location in Northern California where Turner "roughed it" according to *Look* magazine and a "Maori village was hacked out of California woods by a bulldozer."²⁶ Ever diligent in its dream of realism and authenticity, Hollywood hired "a technical adviser from New Zealand who also plays a native chief in the picture."²⁷

Hollywood's saturation in New Zealand is unquestionably hegemonic in the Gramscian sense. Filmmaker John O'Shea comments on how, as a young boy, he quickly tired of "British [films] being British" and preferred an afternoon with Warner Bros.' gangsters like Cagney, Robinson, and Raft who he identified as his "role models."²⁸ Seventy years later, "role models" from Hollywood apparently still abound as young Maori kids follow the lead of Los Angeles and New York gangster rappers—Hollywood style. In New Zealand, Hollywood/America commodification is an amalgam of cultural activity that is simultaneously embraced and re-written under the terms of its ideology.²⁹

At the height of the system, all major studios were distributing films into the country. Capitalizing on the mechanisms that functioned brilliantly in the United States, the industry manufactured an ideology that successfully placed Bob Hope and Greer Garson as the most popular man and woman in New Zealand between 1942 and 1945.³⁰ Studio-produced fan magazines such as *Screen Parade: Movie News For New Zealanders* towed the Hollywood (and, although nominally, British Studios) publicity line. To secure their hold on the market, Hollywood invested in New Zealand exhibition. "The Americans have certainly managed to gain considerable interest in one major theatre circuit," wrote Mirams, "but, even in this case, the influence they exert is indirect—Twentieth Century-Fox in America have money invested in Hoyt's Theatres in Australia and Hoyt's have some financial interest in Amalgamated Theaters in New Zealand."³¹

The imbruing of Hollywood imagery and ideology has elicited

ed some very diverse responses from New Zealand filmmakers. Maori documentary filmmaker, Merata Mita, suggests that Hollywood clearly demonstrates that "money doesn't make good film" and furthermore its' sex-and-violence diet lacks a "quality of life" message.³² With the terms "quality of life" up for grabs, queer filmmaker Peter Wells, who prefers "messy, repugnant films," engages a camp (vis-a-vis) Hollywood aesthetic to address a queer New Zealand sensibility.³³ One need only look at his and Stuart Main's *Desperate Remedies* (1987) to be reminded of the high dross of a spectacular Lana Turner arriving in Wellington Harbor in *Green Dolphin Street*. Peter Jackson's *Heavenly Creatures* (1994) and Bruce Morrison's *Constance* (1984) explore similar discomfiting yet pleasurable and uncontrollable cultural experiences in face of Hollywoodized culture. What Hollywood has left behind is "messy," but that is perhaps what accounts for the uncertain pleasure that emits from these New Zealand films.

The commercialization of the film industry and the other creative arts was not merely a Hollywood practice. Art as commodity is (and especially in the age of the industrial arts) the condition of the twentieth century.³⁴ Len Lye and his milieu of high modernists were not immune to the intense foraging of capitalism. Born in Christchurch, Lye from an early age had a strong drive to wed a multi-media effect between sculpture, dance, music, and film.³⁵ Lye soon realized, however, that his homeland was not the place to explore his hyper-kinetic experiments.

Lye first traveled to London in 1926 where he encountered the work of Hans Richter, Viking Eggeling, and Sergei Eisenstein at the London Film Society.³⁶ He made his first film, *Tusalava* (1929), that drew upon primitivist imagery, Freudian tropes, and other contemporary modernist aesthetics ("modernist primitivism" as Roger Horrocks reminds us). Following the creative and economic impulses of John Grierson and Oskar Fischinger, Lye quickly realized that to support his experimental interests in film he would need to embrace the financial resources of commercial advertising.³⁷ Using his theory and practice of "direct film,"³⁸ Lye insisted that the making of the film as art came first and the advertising slogan followed secondarily.³⁹ His exploration of film color brilliantly realized its potential in his highly praised work, *A Colour Box* (1935) which secondarily functioned as an advertisement for the British postal service.

To further help make ends meet, Lye became a full-time director for the American *The March of Time* series in 1944. In 1950 Lye became a United States citizen where his continued film experiments influenced such American avant-garde filmmakers as Stan Brakhage. Anticipating cybernetic culture, Lye theorized that cinematic form should represent forms of life (DNA molecules made, for example, excellent forms for art). While he would only visit New Zealand one more time (1968) before his death, Lye is today recognized as "a role model for the [New Zealand] avant-garde filmmaker."⁴⁰ To secure his historical value to the New Zealand film canon, the country established the Len Lye Foundation in 1980.⁴¹

Roger Horrocks was instrumental in carrying the avant-garde tradition of Lye into the development of Alternative Cinema as a filmmakers co-operative in 1975. With Lye situated as the forebear of experimental film practices in New Zealand, non-Hollywood cinematic interests have ranged from formal 16mm experimentation of the domestic avant-garde to amateur film clubs (the Otago Cine Club, for example). Often the amateur and the avant-garde merged when filmmakers such as Otago's Arthur Richardson's work (*Optical Jazz* [c. 1967] for example) resonated with Lye's 'color-box' sensibility and fusion of film with the other arts.⁴²

Government Involvement in Filmmaking

While early attempts to establish an indigenous feature filmmaking industry in New Zealand were not wholly successful, docu-



Smash Palace, 1982

mentary filmmaking was viewed by many as an appropriate vehicle to "announce" New Zealand to the rest of the world. The government has always been the most important source of production opportunities and finance for filmmakers in New Zealand.⁴³ In fact, the largest number of films made in New Zealand have been at the behest of the government. Until recently, however, it was exclusively documentary film with which the government was concerned. This position was formalized in 1949 when the Motion Picture Industry Committee produced a report that found that there was "no case to be made for the state sponsorship of a feature film industry in New Zealand."⁴⁴

1921 marked the official beginning of the use of film in the service of national interests. In this year, the Government Publicity Office (GPO) was established and administered by the Department of Internal Affairs. It was formed primarily for the purposes of international publicity—i.e. to promote New Zealand to the rest of the world. 349 films were produced by the GPO between 1922 and 1940. Of these films 72.5% were scenics while 18.5% dealt with industry or production subjects. The remaining 9% were items dealing with the war or general civic events.⁴⁵

The emphasis on scenic and industry films reflected the government's belief in film as a valuable asset in the promotion of tourism, immigration, overseas trade and capital investment in New Zealand. With World War II imminent, the government's interest in documentary filmmaking expanded. They became increasingly aware of film's use in war-time propaganda. During 1939 and 1940 a number of discussions at state level took place about the role of cinema for the war effort and about the larger question of national identity. Filmmakers were very involved in these discussions. They were, however, primarily interested in filmmaking as a means of national expression. Such ideas had a certain degree of currency since New Zealand was celebrating its centennial year and was particularly conscious of its nationhood. Indeed, it was a most appropriate time for filmmakers to be lobbying the government on these issues. As historians were writing

24 Hayward's engagement with Maori culture and race relations issues spans his entire career up to and including his final film, *To Love A Maori* (1972).

25 Gordon Mirams, *Speaking Candidly: Films and People in New Zealand*, (Hamilton, NZ: Paul's Book Arcade, 1945), 5.

26 "Lana Turner Takes to the Woods," *Look*, (29 April 1947), 30

27 *Ibid.*, 31.

28 Interview with Jonathan Dennis, "Radio with Pictures," Tape 1, *Voices on Film*.

29 See, for example, Brian McDonnell, "Once Were Warriors: Film, Novel, Ideology," *New Zealand Journal of Media Studies*, 1, no. 2, (1994), 2.

30 Mirams, 46A

31 Mirams, 210. Hoyts is now a major theater chain in New Zealand. Fox now controls New Zealand's satellite Sky Television as well as the Natural History Documentary Film Unit.

32 Dennis, "Against the Odds," Tape 6, *Voices on Film*.

33 *Ibid.*

34 Peter Wollen has persuasively re-thought the possibilities of the modernist condition and the industrial arts in *Raiding the Ice-box: Reflections on Twentieth-Century Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).

35 Wollen. Graduate seminar notes, Film and the Other Arts, UCLA. 10 November 1994.

36 Roger Horrocks. *Composing Motion: Len Lye and Experimental Film-Making*. (Wellington: National Art Gallery, 1991), 9-11.

37 *Ibid.*, 11.

38 A process whereby the filmmaker works directly onto the celluloid without camera involvement, by means of scratching, painting and stenciling.

39 See further, Ann Douglas, *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s*. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995), 70. and Wollen, *Raiding the Ice-box*. The 1920s saw the rapid inter-relationship between multi-media, commercialization, and the creative arts; Lye was no exception.

40 Horrocks, 1991, 14.

41 The Foundation will prove historically valuable since New Zealand was not even a "gleam" in the eyes of London's film aficionados. The London Film Society's programme for 1 December 1929 states: "Mr. Lye is an Australian artist resident in London." See *The Film Society Programmes, 1925-1939*. NY: Arno Press, 1972.

42 Both film groups also had their own published journals that explored creative and technical issues, see *Alternative Cinema* (1972-1986) and the journals of the Otago Cine-Club (of which *Cine-Frame* was the most prominent), published from 1937.

43 The first of these, also New Zealand's oldest surviving footage, was made to record the Royal Tour of the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall in 1901. The government employed cameramen irregularly under the auspices of the Department of Tourism and Publicity until 1921. Sarah Davy, *Images of New Zealand in Government Filmmaking, 1923-40*, Dram 489: (Unpublished Research Essay, Victoria University of Wellington, 1990).

44 Dennis, "A Time Line," *Aotearoa*, 202.



Desperate Remedies, 1993



Heavenly Creatures, 1994

the narratives of New Zealand, filmmakers were marking out their stake in the construction of national identity.

Show Us Your Faces!

But it was not New Zealand filmmakers alone who felt they had a contribution to make to these discussions. John Grierson, noted figure of the British documentary film movement, visited New Zealand in 1940 on the invitation of the government. He was asked to make recommendations for the establishment of a state-funded filmmaking body. Prior to his visit to New Zealand, Grierson had met with the Australian and Canadian governments on a similar brief. In Canada, Grierson had considerable success where he implemented the National Film Board of Canada.⁴⁶

It is perhaps difficult to determine precisely what tangible impact Grierson actually had on the country's documentary film initiatives. Whether or not Grierson had a determining influence in the establishment of the New Zealand National Film Unit (NFU) and/or the character of its output is up for debate. What is certain is that while the government was convinced by Grierson's elaboration on the propagandist uses of filmmaking, his submitted report to them was far in excess of what the government was prepared to implement. It was accordingly rejected. Institutionally, Grierson did not have the impact with which he is often credited. But his contributions to the aesthetic and political discourses surrounding New Zealand filmmaking and what it could do for a nation are highly significant.

It was somewhat of an overstatement then when Gordon Mirams attested that "John Grierson's visit to New Zealand was probably the biggest thing that has ever happened to our native film industry."⁴⁷ But Grierson's statements about filmmaking in New Zealand were nationally broadcast and published on numerous occasions throughout his four month visit. Moreover, his rhetoric seems to have been taken up consciously by a number of filmmakers such as H.H. Bridgeman who, at the time, was directing New Zealand's centennial film, *One Hundred Crowded Years* (1940). The film satisfies one of Grierson's dictates that one should see the human faces who are building the dream of the New Zealand frontier.

"Showing the faces" of New Zealanders was key to Grierson's rhetoric about New Zealand documentary film. He reminded his colonial brethren that British audiences were tiresomely familiar with New Zealand's "mountains and glaciers...tree ferns and...sheep country," the "butter...that always seemed to be called Solid Sunshine," and the "mud that bubbled and hot water on tap from out of the earth," but were quite unfamiliar with the human beings that lived there.⁴⁸ This is a fair observation since human faces had been deliberately excluded from the government's tourist films of the previous decades. It was felt that human figures, garbed in the fashions of the day, unnecessarily dated the films produced and thus reduced their screen life for the distribution circuit overseas.⁴⁹

Grierson was also determined that New Zealand films should show the world its "social experiments." On this point, the government paid notice. "There are audiences all over the world," Grierson opined

who would want to hear about those things...it is particularly vital [that] New Zealand...so notably an experimental ground for democracy should let its voice be heard. It is your right and your duty—and your urgent need—to show democracy in action by bringing these things to life.⁵⁰

If the government was not interested in commodifying entertainment at this point, it was easily persuaded to commodify its "social experiments."

Curiously, it was neither Grierson's expertise nor the lobbying

of filmmakers that finally persuaded the government to establish the NFU in 1941. It was the screening of a film, *Country Lads* (1941), that galvanized the government's resolve in this matter.⁵¹ The film's depiction of war and New Zealand troops so emotionally charged the ministers that they were moved to tears.⁵² With this film, the powers of the phenomenological experience of film viewing superseded the pedantic dogmatism of Grierson's overseas' wisdom.

With the NFU finally in place, its chief mandate was the production of a ten-minute newsreel called the *Weekly Review*. The purpose of the review was to inform New Zealanders about the progress of the war effort and to document human-interest stories in New Zealand. The *Review* was popular enough to have outlived the war, and its production was continued for the duration of the Labour Party's term. When the Labour Government was defeated in 1949, and replaced by the National Party, the *Weekly Review* came under immediate scrutiny. In 1950, the NFU was charged with political bias and the *Review* was discontinued.

By this time filmmakers Margaret Thomson, Roger Mirams and Stanhope Andrews had resigned from the Unit. In a rather scandalous affair referred to as the "Satchel Incident," NFU filmmaker Cecil Holmes was sacked.⁵³ Although Holmes was important for his historical role in the development of radical filmmaking in the country, it was, unfortunately, this incident that effectively ended his filmmaking career in New Zealand. Inspired and influenced by Grierson, Holmes directed *The Coaster* (1948) which imitated the versified voice-over of Grierson's film *Night Mail*. Aside from formal influences, Holmes was also anxious to mirror Grierson's treatment of the worker in his own films. He wanted to generate pride in labour and give dignity to working life.

The distinction between celebrating the worker and celebrating work can be very subtle. Indeed, to watch some of the films of this decade it is difficult to be entirely sure whether the celebration of the worker is not just a pretext for the promotion of progressive and successful New Zealand industry. Not until Holmes directed his film, *Fighting Back* (1949—the first trade union and avowedly left-wing documentary made in New Zealand with the assistance of Rudall Hayward), no film, particularly no NFU film, had rigorously dealt with wages, work conditions, or any other industrial-relations theme. The loss of key filmmakers such as Holmes stripped away the enthusiasm and promise that the NFU once held. Thereafter, the NFU output diminished, yielding a production of films similar in content to that of the Government Publicity Office.

But a number of the filmmakers of the NFU went on to foster a different sort of documentary tradition. As part of a tradition inaugurated by Holmes' a group of filmmakers in the late 1970s and early 1980s formed Vanguard Film. It included such filmmakers such as Russell Campbell, Rod Prosser and Alister Barry. Merata Mita and Gerd Pohlman also collaborated with Vanguard Films on a number of projects. Vanguard Films made a number of trade-union documentaries that told the history of unionization and industrial disputes that occurred in the country. Merata Mita directed several significant documentaries that dealt with race-relations in New Zealand including *Bastion Point—Day 507* (1980; a collaboration with Gerd Pohlman and Leon Narbey), the highly successful *Patu!* (1983) and *Mana Waka* (1990). *Patu!* is particularly important for the way it reveals the manifestation of racism that occurred during the 1981 South African Springbok rugby tour played in New Zealand. The 1970s also witnessed the emergence of documentary filmmaking by feminists as both a powerful political tool and means for personal expression. Such films include Stephanie Beth's *I Want to be Joan* (1977) and Sherleen Malony's *Irene '59*. Recent filmmakers such as Annie Goldson (*Wake* [1993], *Seeing Red* [1994] and *Punitive Damage* [1999]) have continued this strong documentary tradition.

In 1948, NFU filmmakers Roger Mirams (Gordon's brother) and Alun Falconer founded Pacific films, arguably the most significant of New Zealand's independent film companies. In addition to the many corporate-sponsored industrial films, scenics, and road safety films made by the company, John O'Shea of Pacific Films also produced the *Tangata Whenua* television documentary series (Barclay, 1974). This production was extremely important for the recognition of Maori cultural identity in New Zealand. It was the first time Maori had the opportunity to take an active role in the presentation of their own culture. For Pakeha, it was the first time they had had the opportunity to see a complex and sympathetic depiction of Maori culture. The company was also responsible for the only three feature films produced in New Zealand between 1940 and 1970. John O'Shea was director on all three films: *Broken Barrier* (1952) *Runaway* (1964) and New Zealand's only musical, *Don't Let it Get You* (1966).

Towards Feature Film Production

The fact that there were only three feature films made over such a long period of time clearly indicates the difficulties New Zealand filmmakers faced without government subsidy or sponsorship. A few feature films were produced in the 1970s as well as a number of tele-features including Paul Maunder's *Gone up North for a While* (1972) and Murray Reece's *The God Boy* (1976).⁵⁴ Independent filmmakers were, nonetheless, struggling. There was no industry to speak of, no studios, and certainly no film school. In effect, there was very little by way of professional training for filmmakers. What experience filmmakers did get tended to be either in television commercials or short-film production. There was practically no opportunity to get experience working on dramatic feature-length narrative productions.

Simultaneously, the government renegotiated its position in relation to feature filmmaking. Entertainment and feature filmmaking was increasingly considered to be a more powerful medium for the expression of national identity. The first step towards the establishment of a government-funded feature filmmaking body came with the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council (QEII). This state institution provided financial assistance to the arts in general. In 1970, the Arts Council gave a direct indication of interest in film when it organized a conference to discuss, among other things, the direction of the film industry in New Zealand. From this conference came a broad agreement that New Zealand needed an institution specifically dedicated to the sponsorship of a variety of filmmaking endeavors.⁵⁵

Echoing 1940, filmmakers' lobbying gave considerable impe-

45 Davy, np

46 See further on Grierson's international travels, Margot Fry, *A Servant of Many Masters: A History of the National Film Unit of New Zealand* (Unpublished MA Thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 1995), 22.

47 Mirams, 203.

48 Mirams, 204.

49 Davy, np

50 Qtd. in Mirams, 204-5.

51 Fry, 29.

52 A similar effect was produced by Gaylene Preston's documentary, *War Stories Our Mother's Never Told Us* (1995) which movingly presented the stories of New Zealand women's experience during the war as told by themselves.

53 In 1948 Holmes' private papers (including those indicating his affiliation with the Communist Party and his intention to organize a stop-work meeting at the Film Unit) were stolen and made public as proof that there were communist sympathizers working in the public service and inciting discontent. What the incident proved above all was the presence of McCarthyism in New Zealand. For a full account of the episode see Dean Parker, 'Scoundrel Times at the Film Unit', *Illusions* 7 (1988).

54 Space limitations do not allow us to touch on the important relationship of television in New Zealand to domestic film production. For an overview of the state of television see Paul Smith's *Revolution in the Air!* (Auckland: Longman, 1996).

55 This was expressed in several resolutions passed by those attending the conference: a 'National Screen Organization' should be established and that there should be some development in terms of media education in New Zealand. From *Report of Arts Conference '70*, cited by Waller, 245.

tus to this conference discussion. In 1977, independent filmmakers (including Geoff Murphy, John O'Shea, and Australian-born Roger Donaldson) formed the New Zealand Academy of Motion Pictures. As an agency of filmmakers, they were able to put pressure on the government for the establishment of a film commission. They wrote letters and articles to newspapers and politicians, held meetings and seminars and produced press releases.⁵⁶ In part because of these filmmaker's interventions, several reports were produced between 1977 and 1978 advising the government of the advantages of a feature film industry. On the strength of these papers the Interim Film Commission was established in October 1977.⁵⁷ Two further reports were produced by the Interim Commission. These reports are fascinating because they give a significant indication of the types of policy that the Commission intended to pursue, and they highlight the ways in which the usefulness of film might best serve the national interest.

Against a backdrop of cultural anxiety over the dominance of American films, the notion of what, Gregory Waller terms, "spectatorial right" was introduced.⁵⁸ In other words, the reports argued that New Zealanders had the *right* to see images relevant to themselves in the movies that they saw. A short time later, the economic imperatives converged with this concept of "spectatorial right." Jim Booth, author of *Proposal to Establish a Film Production Commission* and a member of the cultural sector in the Department of Internal Affairs, insisted that the Film Commission should be run "strictly on an investment basis and with an eye firmly on the market."⁵⁹ He did not believe, therefore, that a Commission should be in the business of funding films that could not themselves generate revenue (this presumably encompassed both documentary and experimental filmmaking).

Booth argued that film is an "exportable income generating product that [would] do much to announce the existence of New Zealand to the world" and more importantly "begin to counter the country's notorious antipodean cultural cringe."⁶⁰ Hence, film is still perceived in terms of publicity for New Zealand. Now, however, it was argued that publicity had a cultural value for New Zealanders themselves. Film is a "cultural capital" that generates self-esteem as well as revenue.

The second report produced by the Interim Film Commission went further. It contended that a feature film industry could be "justified on economic reasons alone."⁶¹ In effect, feature filmmaking could in fact prove the solution to the country's economic problems.⁶² Shortly thereafter, and while the country faced the precarious economic conditions of the late 1970s, the New Zealand government formally ratified the existence of the Film Commission in October 1978.

With the mandate "To encourage and also to participate and assist in the making, promotion, distribution and exhibition of films: to encourage and promote cohesion within the New Zealand film industry" and to ensure that films given assistance by the Film Commission were "distinctively New Zealand" the commission was now in the business of making films with an eye toward financial and cultural profitability.⁶³ For the marketing of New Zealand films overseas, the Film Commission considers itself the "enduring brand" for the recognition of the New Zealand film industry.⁶⁴

At the outset, filmmakers remained dissatisfied with the level of funding: wages were low and budgets were small. Annually, the Commission received a grant of NZ\$ eight million. Only ten percent of that sum was made available directly from the government with the rest of the money made up in grants from the Lottery Board.⁶⁵ Despite the relatively meager financing available to an industry that has only rarely ever been able to recoup its production costs, New Zealand has produced over one hundred films since the establishment of the Film Commission.⁶⁶

The importance of Maori participation in the industry is certainly acknowledged in Film Commission literature. Maori filmmakers have, however, sought their own voice in the New Zealand film industry. Filmmakers such as Barry Barclay and Merata Mita have insisted that Maori people be able to "develop their own mythology,"⁶⁷ so as to create their own images. Maori filmmaking stresses the necessary decolonization of representation that hitherto had been produced entirely by Pakeha. Importantly, both Barclay's *Ngati* (1987) and Merata Mita's *Mauri* (1988) employed a cast and crew that was predominantly Maori. Moreover, films such as *Once Were Warriors* (1994) were directed by Lee Tamahori, written by Riwhia Brown, and performed with mainly a Maori cast. Nonetheless, there have only been a handful of films directed by Maori filmmakers. As Mita puts it:

Maori film makers have to address several issues not of their own choosing when they decide on a project of fiction. They have to satisfy all the demands of the cinema, the demands of their own people, the criteria of a white male-dominated value and funding structure, and somehow be accountable to all. As well, their projects have to show what American's call 'cross-over potential', and the filmmaker has to raise about one-third of the projected budget. Worse still is the knowledge that the Maori film maker carries the burden of having to correct the past...destroying the stereotypes that come from cultural appropriation and clearing the colonial refuse out of oneself...⁶⁸

The relationship between Pakeha funding structures and Maori filmmakers continues to be an ongoing matter of discussion in the New Zealand film industry.

For a short time around 1982, however, a great deal of finance for film production was readily available. A boom in feature film production coincided with a tax shelter that enabled investors to write off 100% of their production expenses on Film Commission films. Not surprisingly, a number of New Zealand's business community became film producers. This was not because they were inherently interested in filmmaking, but because, as an investment opportunity, film production became highly profitable. The windfall was short-lived, however. Once the tax shelter was deemed illegal, the laws changed. New legislation pertaining to the film industry actually became more stringent than that applied to other industries. The obvious effect was the loss of commercial investment in film production and fewer films being made.⁶⁹

Manufacturing a Cinematic National Identity

The feature films produced since the establishment of the Commission demonstrate the difficulty in showing the 'truth' about the New Zealand 'way of life' or indeed providing images 'relevant' to New Zealanders⁷⁰. It is impossible to do justice here to the range and complexity of New Zealand's film criticism. Nonetheless commentators have explored in different ways very similar aspects of New Zealand film. A number of writers (particularly actor/filmmaker Sam Neill, filmmakers Gaylene Preston and Merata Mita, writers Nicholas Reid and Russell Campbell) have noted and, in some cases, complicated the predominant strain of male machismo in the New Zealand films of the 1970s and 1980s. This trope of masculine anxiety has been discussed as the "man alone" thesis, the "boy's own" film, "the white-neurotic industry," New Zealand "gothic" and the "cinema of unease".⁷¹

This anxiety is not necessarily reserved for men in New Zealand films. It is, we suggest, more closely related to the identity imperative itself. In films such as *Constance* (1984), *Crush* (1992), and *Sleeping Dogs* (1977) the central concern of the threat of the outsider—especially as embodied in the American or

Hollywood in the case of *Constance*—is presented as dangerously seductive or menacing. The dream of a pure New Zealand landscape is also rethought in this body of work. In films such as *Smash Palace* (1982), *Good-bye Pork Pie* (1981), *Crush* (1992), *Constance* (1984), *Mr. Wrong* (1985), *Utu* (1983), *Heavenly Creatures* (1994), *Once Were Warriors* (1994), and *Desperate Remedies* (1993), New Zealanders confront the threat of commodity-culture Otherness in a landscape that is littered (quite literally) with everything from car wreckage to human wreckage.

We would argue that the source of anxiety in these canonical New Zealand films is not so much a pathology of masculinity, uncontrollable violence, or madness. Rather, the anxiety present in these films is the very need to express identity itself. This is perhaps why there is, in many of these films, an insistent return to the bush where the originary myth of frontier—the original dream of nationhood—purportedly exists. The representations of the frontier are now, however, corrupted. The bush is now, for example, the scene of violent confrontation or anxiety (*Bad Blood* [1981], *Sleeping Dogs*, *Vigil* [1984], *The Lost Tribe* [1985]) where the possibility of retrieving a stable national identity is thwarted. These images suggest to us the anxiety of the very process of reflecting a distinctive national identity (Peter Jackson's and Costa Botes' film, *Forgotten Silver* [1995], brilliantly parodies these anxieties in relation to the formation of a New Zealand film canon). After all, the expression of New Zealandness, as with any identity, national or otherwise, is an extremely complex and difficult task, and should not be undertaken but with anxiety.

Ultimately we understand this anxiety to be a productive force.⁷² That this anxiety is frequently coupled with pleasure, should not be overlooked by those who wish to secure a darker reading of New Zealand films. *Constance's* ill-fated fascination with Hollywood, the ecstatic, creative, and sexual friendship of Pauline and Juliet in *Heavenly Creatures*, and the anarchic vigor and energy of *Goodbye Pork Pie* present the ever fluctuating condition of identity as it is always already, to borrow filmmaker Vincent Ward's terms, "impure."⁷³ The violence that subtends commodity culture guarantees this.

Filmmaking in New Zealand has not always generated the revenue that had been anticipated by individuals such as Jim Booth. It is perhaps for this reason that recent Film Commission publications have emphasized the importance of a distinctive product for large domestic audiences as well as the international market.⁷⁴ This, if anything, foregrounds the difficulty of selling low-budget features in an increasingly tight overseas market. As a result the Commission has started to focus on producing a number of "feel good/comedy" scripts and "no budget" features intended for release primarily in New Zealand.⁷⁵

In addition the emphasis has shifted from attracting international markets to encouraging overseas investment in the industry. Indeed, one of the more significant aspects of New Zealand filmmaking at the end of the century is the extent to which the industry has been affected by the presence of overseas productions.⁷⁶ In terms of finance, exposure, and the development of a 'critical mass' (or talent and expertise), overseas productions such as the \$NZ264 million *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (Peter Jackson, currently in production) and the television productions *Xena* and *Hercules* give a powerful boost to the industry.⁷⁷ If our own state-supported feature filmmaking cannot afford to compete in overseas markets, then productions such as these will ensure that international audiences will still have the opportunity to see a rather imperfect and ever-volatile New Zealand landscape.

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56 Geoff Murphy, "The End of the Beginning," *Aotearoa*, 134.

57 There were at least four reports produced making recommendations on the organization and usefulness of a state funded feature filmmaking body. The first was the *Final Report of the Film Industry Working Party* delivered to the QEII Arts Council in April 1975. This was followed by Booth's *Proposal to Establish a New Zealand Film Production Commission*, July 1977. The reports produced after the establishment of the Interim Commission in 1978 were entitled *Towards a New Zealand Motion Picture Production Policy and Design for the Motion Picture Production Industry*.

58 Waller, 245. Waller cites the *Final Report of the Film Industry Working Party of the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council* (1975), 4-6, 23.

59 J.L. Booth, *Proposal to Establish a Film Production Commission*, (July 1977), 1, 25. Cited by Waller, 246.

60 Waller, 246.

61 Ibid., 247.

62 The second report of the Interim Film Commission (*Design for the Motion Picture Production Industry*) maintained that a feature film industry had "considerable potential to give New Zealanders the economic, morale [sic] and cultural benefits that are so needed in these difficult times" (9). As cited by Waller, p. 247.

63 *Statement of Objectives for the New Zealand Film Commission, 1999-2000*, www.nzfilm.co.nz/frame4aboutus_objectiv.html, Internet, 10 Nov 1999.

64 Ibid.

65 *Statement of Objectives for the New Zealand Film Commission, 1999-2000*, ibid., see "Financial Forecasts."

66 Ibid.

67 Barry Barclay, "Amongst Landscapes" *Aotearoa*, 129.

68 Merata Mita, "The Soul and the Image," *Aotearoa*, 49.

69 Filmmaker Geoff Murphy explains how he saw the tax shelter as a "form of legalised fraud," *Aotearoa*, 148.

70 These somewhat problematic terms are taken from the *Final Report of the Film Industry Working Party*, as cited by Waller, 245-6.

71 Nicholas Reid, *A Decade of New Zealand Cinema: Sleeping Dogs to Came a Hot Friday*, (Dunedin: John McIndoe, 1986), Merata Mita, "The Soul and the Image", Russell Campbell, "Dis-memembering the Kiwi Bloke: Representations of Masculinity in *Braindead*, *Desperate Remedies* and *The Piano*," *Illusions* 24 (Spring 1995). Sam Neill and Judy Rymer in their film, *Cinema of Unease* (1995), have gone so far as to suggest that this dark strain of madness and anxiety is, in fact, a reflection of a tortured national psyche. Neill makes this connection explicit in his comparison of the murderous rampages of Stan Graham in *Bad Blood* and the actual figure of David Gray in *Aramoana* (1990). What can at times sound like a psychopathology of the nation's identity via its cinema may perhaps be seen as yet another form of currency (along with the exoticization of the landscape and the indigenous people) in the commodification of New Zealand film.

72 As such, it is a term that we employ differently from, say, Sam Neill's use of "unease."

73 Vincent Ward in interview with Russell Campbell and Miro Bilbrough, "A Dialogue with Discrepancy," *Illusions* 10, (March 1989) 11.

74 *Statement of Objectives for the New Zealand Film Commission, 1999-2000*.

75 Ibid. The Commission's objectives states "To broaden the slate of feature films in development, the NZFC announced [an] initiative to stimulate five feel-good/comedy scripts to first draft." In relation to Kahukura "No Budget" films: "The NZFC committed finance to a proposal from Kahukura productions and producer Larry Parr, to stimulate an environment that opens up a greater range of film making opportunities."

76 The current production of *Vertical Limit* in Queenstown and Peter Jackson's Wellington based production of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy are creatively engineered by New Zealand talent but have the deep pockets of Hollywood to finance the projects. The landscapes for both films will undoubtedly provide exotic publicity fodder. The New Zealand press is thrilled that Bollywood has set up shop here as well. "One Billion will watch film" shouts the headline in *The Otago Daily Times* (B9, 20 August 1999). The hope that a "billion" tourists will be enchanted by the cinematic rendering of Queenstown echoes the hopes of Whitehouse, Hayward and the GPO.

77 "Wellywood," the term coined by North and South writer Lauren Quaintance, denotes the establishment of a substantial and relatively autonomous industry infrastructure in Wellington. The larger part of this infrastructure is made up of Peter Jackson's "multi-million dollar film empire" (58) as well as several other production companies. Now possessing the technology and (as always) the proximity to a range of impressive locations, the gap between Hollywood and Wellington in terms of the possibilities for production, is perceived as narrowed. One can only wonder if "Wellywood" will generate the international recognition and profit that the New Zealand film industry has always sought.

Love and Rage

Irish Cinema of the 1990s

by Carole Zucker and
Kristian Moen

When one visits Ireland these days, one is immediately struck by the amount of construction, particularly noticeable in the cranes that dot the landscape of Dublin, but equally apparent in the more or less continuous roadwork around the countryside to widen byways that only a few years ago were still the width of a horse and buggy. That mode of transportation has been replaced by a seemingly endless parade of BMWs, which used to signal the presence of German tourists, but now the BMW is more likely to be driven by a resident of Ireland. Housing starts rose a remarkable 30% in 1997, and "only" 25% the following year. The Irish proudly consider themselves Europeans, and their position as a thriving member of the EC has granted them a great opportunity to throw off the yoke of their entwinement with England. The continuing peace talks in Northern Ireland and the effects of the 1998 Good Friday peace accord have finally ushered in enormously productive political changes, possibly ending decades of political instability.

Ireland has always been a centre of friction and difference, embedded in a vigorous history of the arts, but its status as a film-producing nation has always been slight. This is no longer the case. One important cultural ramification of the Irish boom has been the sudden growth of Irish cinema, producing a new site and catalyst for productive cultural arguments. The 1990s represents a fertile moment for cinema culture in Ireland, marked by the re-creation of Bord Scannán na h'Éirann (The Irish Film Board) in 1993. The Board has had a checkered past,



The Butcher Boy, 1997

begun only in 1980, it was severely truncated in 1986. Lean years followed in Irish film production, an interlude marked, albeit, by some large-scale successes, e.g. *My Left Foot* (1989, Sheridan) and *The Crying Game* (1992, Jordan). But the lack of governmental support for the indigenous industry had its effect at many levels, from the mid '80s to the mid '90s. In hindsight, one can see that the very beginning of the Board in 1980 made a crucial contribution to the development of film in Ireland. *Eat the Peach* (1986), *Reefer and The Model* (1983), *Anne Devlin* (1984), and *Angel* (1982) were amongst the films, which, in very different ways, initiated a rich period of filmmaking.

One need only look at the numbers to realize the enormity of the growth of the native industry in the past few years. In the fifteen year period between 1979 and 1993, a total of 46 Irish feature films were made. In the five year period between 1995 and 1999, a total of over 70 films have been made. Moreover, Ireland has an emerging festival circuit, including the Dublin Film Festival, the Cork International Film Festival, and the International Celtic Film and Television Festival in Belfast. This burgeoning film scene includes festivals for emerging filmmakers: The Cork Youth International Film and Video Arts Festival, and the Junior Dublin Film Festival; and there is one festival that takes place in Manchester, The Kino Festival of New Irish Cinema. The refurbished Northern Ireland Film Council has also recently begun to develop filmmaking in its six counties. It provides seed money for films shot by indigenous Northern Irish

filmmakers, as well as marketing the Northern counties as locations for international film productions. The impact of Northern Irish filmmaking, and the ways in which it will developed both in tandem and in contradistinction to filmmaking in the Republic remains to be seen. What is clear, however, is that Irish cinema has made incredible advancements, and it is unlikely that it will retreat in the near future. But where is Irish cinema headed — what are the issues and concerns of filmmakers working in Ireland today? Trying to take into account as broad a range of Irish films as possible, we pose the question, "what are Irish films talking about?"

On the 1st of March, 1981, Bobby Sands, an imprisoned IRA member, began his hunger strike. Protesting prison conditions for political prisoners, as well as the continued oppression of Ireland at the hands of the English, Sands spearheaded what would prove to be one of the key events in modern Irish history. On the 5th of May, 1981, after 66 days without food, Bobby Sands died. The hunger strike proved to be a political lightning rod. Richard Kearney describes it as speaking through "mythic idioms of martyrdom",¹ drawing on "the sacrificial myth of martyrdom in the discourse of the 'past' generations of Republicans."² Recent Irish films seem to have rallied around the mythic power of this episode, presenting the prison as an informing thematic metaphor. The sheer volume of prison scenes in Irish films tells us that this image has burnt itself into the minds of filmmakers. Prisons are central to the two most well-known Irish films of the last decade, *In the Name of the Father* (1993, Sheridan) and *The Crying Game*. In the last few years, films where prisons (or reform schools, or asylums) play a part in the narrative include *Some Mother's Son*, *I Went Down*, *The Boxer*, *The Butcher Boy*, *Crush Proof*, *A Further Gesture*, *All Souls' Day* and *Night Train*.

Whether employing the image of the prison as a place for martyrdom (*Some Mother's Son*), or criticizing it as a ruinous tradition (*The Boxer*), films compulsively return to this site. It has been used as a symbol of desperation, entrapment, wills imposed and loves thwarted. When the prison is removed from its political/historical context, as in the ubiquitous Irish gangster genre, it remains a potent symbol of entrapment. While this sometimes takes a literal form, it also serves as a metaphor for characters who are caught in a life of crime, manipulated, haunted and hunted by forces beyond their control. In Irish film, history also functions as a metaphorical prison. Central to the work of Irish film is the moral quandary, the psychic scar, the hidden secret. Some of the most interesting national cinemas can be seen as attempts to create a social mythology which will serve as a point of departure unifying disparate visions and opinions, and galvanizing the response of an audience. As such, Irish cinema is a deeply felt exploration of a nation's historical and political context, seen as a prison.

The discussion that follows is an overview of Irish films made in the past five years, focusing on the Irish films shown at the Montreal World Film Festival in 1999. In its yearly tribute to the films of a particular country, the festival chose Ireland. The Irish films found at the festival were a decidedly mixed bag — which one might say about the World Film Festival as a whole. Nevertheless, the films (all of which were released in Ireland in 1999) cover a range of genres and subjects, and we can see how they reflect some dominant themes of recent Irish film. In order to position these tendencies within a wider sample, we have also looked to a comprehensive list of Irish films from the past five years, either viewing them or using their plot synopses as indica-

1 Richard Kearney, *Postnationalist Ireland: Politics, Culture, Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1997), 112.
2 Ibid., 111.





tions of their topics and interests.³ Not all Irish films fit within the thematic framework of the prison; for instance there are a number of Irish films whose concerns are with modern urban relationships. Moreover, Irish cinema is part of a web of complex and sometimes contradictory influences which includes politics, history, art, culture, religion, modernization and regionalism. Nevertheless, a thematic approach can help shed some light on Irish cinema.

One notable absence at the Montreal International Film Festival were films depicting political violence. Perhaps the assumption was that this subject has been so frequently seen on theatrical screens, that there's no need to belabour the point. Or perhaps there was a dearth of films about the "troubles" produced in 1999, since such films make up only a small number of the total output of Irish cinema. Whatever the reason, it is crucial to note the centrality of this genre in the Irish cinematic imagination. The films which do depict political violence, stress that characters have become implicated in political violence beyond their control. In *Nothing Personal* (1995, O'Sullivan) and *This is the Sea* (1997, McGuckian), characters are caught in the context of political violence. The subject of the Irish potato famine, in *The Hanging Gale* (1995, Lawrence), is framed in terms of non-violent protest and actual revolt. Jim Sheridan's *The Boxer* (1997), its tendency to caricature and apotheosize notwithstanding, presents us with a tale of the control that the IRA and the spectre of political violence exert on the film's characters.

It might seem that emigration would relieve characters of the political or historical complexity of Ireland, but distance does not protect characters from their backgrounds and their lives in Ireland. In films set outside Ireland, characters still find themselves trapped by politics and/or the past. In *Exiled* (1999, Muir), a criminal on the run in New York becomes caught up in gun smuggling for the IRA; in *A Further Gesture* (1997, Dornhelm), an escaped prisoner becomes embroiled in a political assassination of a Guatemalan military officer. Whether or not these films support the eventual political violence of their characters, it is clear that this is less a sought out means and more an example of a fatalistic approach to Irish politics. Non-political films about those who have emigrated from Ireland which are not explicitly political often still depict the pull of Ireland. *The Nephew* (1997,

Brady) and *This is My Father* (1998, Quinn) both centre around characters' attempts to come to terms with their family history in Ireland. The inability of a character to escape his past is depicted in *2BY4* (1997, Smallhorne). Getting away, getting out, moving beyond is sometimes a preoccupation for characters, but it is rarely, if ever, realized onscreen.

One of the films which showed at the Montreal International Film Festival, *I Could Read the Sky* (1999, Bruce), is also about the experience of the Irish diaspora. This imagistic memory film, tells the story of an Irish labourer who has moved to England. Its subject is essentially the Irish exploitation by England ("we dig the tunnels, we lay the rails, we are unrecorded, we have no names...") Although its dramatic power is hampered by its literary pretensions and sometimes laborious first-person addresses, the visuals effectively commu-

nicate themes of loss and memory. The film begins with abstract images, superimpositions and optical printing. The visual interest is reflected also in the muted colours of England, some memorable grainy footage, and artfully composed images. These take the form particularly of observations of the existents of daily life for the main character, such as cutlery, fingers playing a fiddle, whiskey glasses, wood, material of clothing — all underscoring the visual importance of detail and texture. The film's layered sound track, with Celtic music, fiddling, piano, radio and voice provides a striking aural component, deepening the texture of memory and loss.

Another key genre in Irish cinema is the gangster film. In other national contexts, the gangster genre can be put to many uses. In Irish cinema, it is a common genre in which to explore themes of entrapment. Two films about the famed criminal exploits of Martin Cahill, *The General* (1998, Boorman) and *Vicious Circle* (1998, Blair) set the tone. *The General* is a major contribution to this genre, powerfully depicting the underbelly of urban experience in Dublin and Belfast. This film, and its genre, imply that the "troubles" and criminal activity have become inextricably entwined in Irish life. The main character, Cahill, is resolutely apolitical, but finds himself enmeshed in a web of police, loyalist and IRA interests as he attempts to hock stolen jewellery. Like *The General*, *Vicious Circle* depicts Martin Cahill's ascendancy to the throne of criminality after his successful jewellery heist. The film depicts the triangular relationship of violence, between Cahill at the centre and the police and the IRA on either side. These films explicitly demonstrate what is implicit in the Irish gangster genre: the connections between entrapment in a political situation and entrapment in a life of crime.

Sweetie Barrett (1999, Bradley) and *Sunset Heights* (1998, Villa) are two further examples of films whose protagonists become caught within a criminal context circling around them. An interesting detail in *Sunset Heights* is that a gangland execution of a child occurs on a Druidic site. Since we haven't seen the film, this detail remains somewhat enigmatic, but a connection to the past and an illustration of the continuity of violence is clearly indicated.

Two films that screened at the Montreal festival reiterate the

theme of entrapment in quite different ways. *Accelerator* (1999, Murphy), which boasts the same director of photography as *The General*, the brilliant Seamus Deasy, begins in Belfast and ends up in Dublin—as its shiftless petty-criminal teens race stolen cars. The film is gripping, well-cast, loud and energetic. The film's energy may have something to do with its director's varied background—having played in a punk band, acted, composed and directed several short films. But the film's theme fits into the one which we have been discussing—in this film characters struggle through the imprisonments of poverty, a life on the dole and small town criminality. The excess, the joyride and the flight of characters are tinged with futility. You can't get out because your society won't let you.

Night Train (1999), the much anticipated first feature by director John Lynch, who has been the long time director of Irish television (the RTE) as well as an important producer, strains to combine its subject of personal liberation within the gangster genre. The film tells the story of a small-time embezzler (John Hurt) who has been recently released from prison and owes money to a sadistic criminal. He lives in a space between criminal life and fantasy, enjoying his model trains. On the run, he meets Alice/ Brenda Blethyn, who is similarly trapped, living with a monstrous mother. Alice escapes through books, and the two of them gradually fall in love. It might have been a lovely small film, but the unconvincing crime element continuously intrudes on the story and ends up usurping top position in the film. Although the film is raised by its level of acting, it is lowered by constant clichés and ends up far-fetched and disappointing. Nevertheless, it illustrates the characters' attempt to

escape through imagination and communication.

The clever and witty gangster film, *I Went Down* (directed by Paddy Breatnach and written by playwright Conor McPherson, 1997) recapitulates these themes, while suggesting a somewhat ironic distance from them. The film tells the story of two men manipulated into doing a job for a mob boss. This leads them on a road trip together, filled with engagingly bizarre conversations and revelations, as well as the genre's usual action and violence. Git, the younger, quieter half of the film's buddy twosome has been recently released from prison. But his inability to articulate his feelings — particularly about love and family — provide a metaphorical prison. His verbose partner has a similar difficulty in his overflow of speech and self-confidence, masking his personal failures and sexual insecurities. This leads to another theme common to Irish cinema: the power and danger of speech. The subject of verbal expression is found in the film's dynamic use of dialogue's rhythms and hidden intents — and finds a purely negative exemplar in the trickster that they take hostage. His telling of stories and lies becomes an exploration of the stasis that can result from verbal posturing and storytelling. In the film's conclusion, the stream of meaningless words has to end and the past has to be literally exhumed before the characters can escape from their criminal context. While this takes place, their personal revisiting of past failures allows them a chance to defy their personal prisons.

There are Irish films which document escape. These appear to

3 Correspondence with Sunniva O'Flynn. The list was generated from the Irish Film Board's "Film Showcase" database, and covered the period from 1995 to 4 November 1999, inclusive.

In the Name of the Father, 1993



be largely understated character studies. *A Man of No Importance* (1995, Krishnama) and *The Book That Wrote Itself* (1999, O'Mochian) are about theatre and literature, respectively. That art provides a way out come as no surprise. Another common tact is the coming of age story's focus on the imaginary worlds of children. Some examples include: *Frankie Starlight* (1995, Lindsay-Hogg) where escape is in the stars; *The Boy From Mercury* (1996, Duffy) where escape is in the planet Mercury; *The Sun, The Moon and The Stars* (1997, Creed) where escape is through music; and *Joe My Friend* (1997, Bould) where escape is found in the world of the circus. What emerges from this quick glance at these films is the indication that imagination and dreamy-eyed abandon are depicted, rather than the harder edge of ambition.

Just as *I Went Down* can be seen as a subtle elaboration of some of the common elements of the gangster film, Neil Jordan's *Butcher Boy* (1997) is a sardonic critique of the naiveté of the theme of escape through imagination. Based on Patrick McCabe's novel of the same title, the film follows Francie Brady's quest for a way out of his stifling social environment. Through Brady's journey we can see fascinating glimpses of Irish life in the 1950s and one boy's desire to journey through imagination, nature and the Virgin Mary. But the film gradually shifts in tone from an energetic boy's desperate yearning for belonging and freedom to a narrative of madness, sadism and murder. The boy's verbal alacrity and his propensity for deceit deepen the irony so that we might question the ability of expression to truly come to terms with a need for escape without itself deceiving us. It is a trenchant critique of the too easy solution in a complex web of societal and political oppression. The film's apocalyptic scene near

the end indicates the nihilistic overtones of escape for its own sake.

Shifting the discussion to Irish films about women, we notice a smooth continuity. In *The Boxer*, Emily Watson's character renews a relationship with an old flame while her husband is in prison. The local IRA, lead by her father, is virulently opposed to what they see as a betrayal of the heroic status of those serving prison terms for political crimes. She finally confronts her father, telling him that "I'm the prisoner here. You and your politics have made sure of that." She could just as well be speaking for many women in Irish film—their lives and experiences are often shown in order to illustrate a male-dominated political context. Certainly *In the Name of the Father* has been influential in this regard: portraying Emma Thompson's lawyer as a capable woman who is both active and, at the same time, whose personal desires, issues or problems are subservient to her role within the political and historical context. As noted earlier, *Some Mother's Son* (1996, George) is about the way in which the H-Block hunger strike effects the mother of one of the prisoners. Although the mother is the focus of the film, her plight is used as a means to illustrate the broader political context and to confirm sanctification of Bobby Sands.

Similarly, *Titanic Town* (1998, Michell) an English film about an obviously Irish subject positions the female lead as shaped and manipulated by the Irish political context. One of the films at the Festival, *A Love Divided* (1999, Macartney), is another example of this tendency. It tells the true story of a young Protestant woman who marries a Catholic man, and who refuses to send her children to a Catholic school. Once again, social and

I Went Down, 1997





Some Mother's Son, 1993

political crises are refracted through the depiction of a woman's experience. It is little more than a well-acted TV movie, with little new to offer. Films about women which are less political tend to depict redemption through facing one's past. *All Souls' Day* (1997, Gilsenan) and *Angela Mooney Dies Again* (1997, McArdle), depict women protagonists as digging through their own personal past, caught up in forces beyond their control.

But some Irish films have moved towards representing women as subjects in their own right. *Anne Devlin*, by one of the few women directors, Pat Murphy, depicts the buried history of a woman revolutionary in the 1803 anti-English uprising. The film's female protagonist is a character who can effect change rather than serve as an illustration of the determining power of her context. *Bogwoman* (1997, Collins) also appears to be in this mode, with its female protagonist actively pursuing a role in Irish nationalism. Similarly, the Northern Ireland film *Hush-A-Bye-Baby* (1989, Harkin) avoids relegating its female protagonist's unwanted pregnancy to an illustration of Ireland's socio-political context. One critic sums it up nicely, "Although Goretti's predicament is informed by the Catholic and nationalist mores she has internalized, Harkin focuses on the material problems a young girl encounters. Despite *Hush-A-Bye Baby's* setting in Derry's Bogside — a traditional nationalist site — the film implies that nationalism is merely one of many ideologies to be explored."⁴

The two most interesting Irish films at The Montreal World

Film Festival indicate that the complex status of women in Irish society, politics and history may be a particularly evocative subject in the future. *The Last September* (1999, Warner) is based on Elizabeth Bowen's novel about the Anglo-Irish community in post-1916 Ireland, and directed by British director, Deborah Warner. This is Warner's first film, but her previous work has included striking reworkings of classics such as *Electra*, *Hedda Gabler*, and *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, as well as a radical version of *A Doll's House* at Paris's Théâtre de l'Odéon. The film is a period piece set in the country home of that class of Anglo-Irish aristocracy known as the Ascendancy, an essentially feudal society, whose days are drawing to a close. The film's social comedy of the dying aristocracy is set against the background of an intense, small-scale war being waged between the "native" Irish and the special force of the British Army, known as the "Black and Tans," mainly a group of embittered WWI veterans engaged to combat the IRA. The exquisitely photographed film, with a moody, delicate play of the texture of image and sound, light and

4 Megan Sullivan, "From Nationalism to 'Baby X': An Interview with Northern Irish Filmmaker Margo Harkin," in *Eire-Ireland* XXXII: 2 & 3 (Summer/Fall 1997), 42.

5 Louisa Burns-Bisogna, *Censoring Irish Nationalism: The British, Irish and American Suppression of Republican Images* (McFarland: Jefferson, North Carolina, 1997), 135.

6 Program notes for 23e. Festival Des Films du Monde, Montreal, 27 août au 6 septembre 1999, 299.

shadow, avoids any sort of monolithic depiction of Ireland. The film is an Irish/U.K. co-production, and it is worth noting that perhaps in light of the rapidly changing relationship between England and Ireland, the British are beginning to take a more sympathetic and complex view of the Irish than has been seen onscreen for a while.

But the real gem of the festival was *Love and Rage* (1999, Black), a powerful navigation between different elements of personal and social entrapment. The director, Cathal Black, sometimes called "the most Irish of Irish filmmakers" began his career as a cameraman for Irish television, where he worked until the early 1970's before turning to independent film-making. Two of his better known films are *Our Boys* (1980) and *Korea* (1995). *Our Boys* is a controversial docudrama on the role of Christian priests in the Irish school system. *Korea* is a Romeo and Juliet story set against the backdrop of a young Irish man who emigrated to America, and who enlisted in and was killed in the Korean war. In her book *Censoring Irish Nationalism*, Louisa Burns-Bisogno provides a description which incorporates the themes of entrapment with buried past that we see in so many Irish films: "The boy's father is trapped by both his excruciating powerlessness... and by his continued rage... To save his son and himself, the father finally lets go of the rage that has consumed him for three decades..."⁵ But Black seems to be adding deeper layers of subtlety to his subject matter in his latest film.

Not usually thought of as a sympathetic portrayal of women, Black succeeds in *Love and Rage* at engaging with a woman character, superbly played by Greta Scacchi. Black says of the film, "this is not what Ireland is supposed to be like in the cinema... it allowed me to examine what can happen when a fiercely independent woman is sexually attracted to a dangerous man, a notion which is part of the dynamic of so-called romantic love. I'd like to think that *Love and Rage* is, in the best sense, a woman's film."⁶ Within this framework which focuses on the complexity of its female protagonist, the film also explores the beginnings of the IRA, notions of heroism and issues of class difference. A strikingly effective analysis of power, sexuality and class is communicated, aided by the historical basis and the film's Gothic tone.

The prison is the image through which the spectrum of themes of desperation is reflected and refracted. Irish films raise the spectre of the futility of escape; they seem to be constituted by a fatalistic worldview where politics and history bind characters intractably to their will. Their varied subject matters — investigations of history, politics, ethics and crime — are tightly wound in an emotional knot of desperation. If the prison serves as a constant reminder of the deeply troubled history of Ireland, films which do not rely on it still compulsively explore the past. Avoidance and wilful ignorance are not solutions in these films. Self-assertion takes place within a naturalistic worldview where politics has replaced social environment as a determining force.

As Irish films begin to step back from their thematic cohesion, however, many new possibilities emerge. For instance, Irish films raise issues of self-representation in that they frequently problematize storytelling — those that weave the tale are sometimes those that have told the lies, whether through the media or through superficial solutions. The stare of the television, a frequent image in Irish film, is both an excuse and an escape. Television hypnotizes characters, making them inactive, apathetic, easy prey for the (usually British) power of the image. While storytelling may carry with it a threat, a trick or a deceit, a tale must be told nonetheless. Somewhere the solution must lie. Where are the glimmers of hope? Is every character swallowed by fate and spat up as merely a product of their history and their home? The rigorous examination of place, accent and the minute

detail all become means to reclaim Irish history and Irish life. Irish films do zero on/in trenchant aspects of the experience of their characters, neither neglecting their environment nor ascribing it godlike power. Irish films do propose mediations and, after taking us through claustrophobic voyages, they offer solutions. They do not suggest closed eyes for the journey, rather one must keep one's head up; then, and only then, might a vision of real hope emerge.

Observers of Irish cinema have voiced concerns about Irish self-expression disappearing in a morass of international co-productions which would misrepresent their Irish subject matter. We can see that international co-productions have been and continue to be an important element of Irish cinema, accounting for 20 of the 71 films in the past five years. Many of these co-productions are with the United Kingdom. The British certainly have a tendency to integrate or co-opt Irish culture into their own film-making and programming, producing a picturesque, and rather hackneyed image of Ireland that is fed to the world at large, e.g. *Widow's Peak* (1994, Irvin), or the regrettable television program, *Ballykissangel*, et al. In a connected, but somewhat different vein, the British often choose to depict the Irish in their own films, often as comic relief, e.g. Stephen Rea's character Patsy, in Mike Leigh's *Life Is Sweet* (1991). But films such as *The Last September* and *I Could Read the Sky*, both discussed earlier, indicate that things are changing for the better. Another important aspect in the development of an Irish cinema is the Section 35 tax break for investment in Irish film. A recent editorial in *Sight and Sound* raised fears about the possible abuses of these tax breaks by those with a great interest in financial incentives and little interest in Irish society and culture.⁷

Writing in 1992, Kevin Rockett sounded yet another note of caution: "The way the Irish cinema void can begin to be filled is through a commitment at a national level to an indigenous Irish cinema. Until then, Ireland will continue to depend for its cinema images on foreign film-makers, not all of whom are... alert to the complexities of Irish culture and society..."⁸

Voicing similar concerns, Scott Forsyth, writing in *CineAction*, described Michael Collins as part of "the simplistic reduction of complex political struggle[which] speaks to the commodification of nations themselves, each able to tell one or two simple national tales in the global cultural marketplace."⁹ Forsyth goes on to note that it is culturally and politically reductive to "cinematically tour the Irish revolution... and the beautifully exotic landscapes converge with the historical distancing of a safely past struggle." Now, with a sizeable body of work to examine, we can see that Irish films have explored their own politics, history and culture as complex and difficult subjects. Certainly further manifestations of Irish self-representation will continue to broaden and deepen Irish cinema. In light of Ireland's economic boom and shifting relationship with England, we wait with anticipation to see how Irish filmmakers transform the thematics of desperation.

⁷ *Sight and Sound* (August, 1997), 3.

⁸ Kevin Rockett, "From Atlanta to Dublin" in *Sight and Sound* (February, 1992), 29.

⁹ Scott Forsyth, "Revolutions that Fail" in *CineAction* 42 (February 1997), 69.

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Repo Man, 1984

How Film Exhibition Has Changed in the Past 50 Years

An Interview with George Mansour

by Stephen Brophy

George Mansour has been booking movies into theaters since the 1960s, and has seen a lot of change in the business of film exhibition in that time. He first worked for Paramount and then Warner Brothers in Boston back in the days when the big Hollywood studios maintained offices in all the major markets. Since then he has booked such locations as the legendary Orson Welles Cinema in Cambridge, the old Nickelodeon Theaters in Boston, and a few gay porn palaces on the side.

People writing about film in the Boston area consider Mansour to be one of their most treasured resources. Although he had no formal education after high school, Mansour's knowledge of foreign, independent, and other "specialty" films is both vast and freely shared. It is a rite of passage for Boston writers to make the trek to Mansour's comfortable Beacon Hill apartment, there to tap into the movie experience so generously and volubly offered, and try to translate this flow of information and memory into an article like this one.

Boston-area writers are not the only people to recognize the unique quality of Mansour's experience and expertise. In his book, *Spike, Mike, Slackers and Dykes*, John Pierson calls Mansour "just about the savviest specialized film buyer anywhere." And in October, 1999 Mansour received the 4th

Annual Salles Achievement in Exhibition Award at Show East in Atlantic City.

Mansour grew up in West Roxbury, an overweight Lebanese gay kid who developed an early passion for movies. He saw two or three a week, and also kept scrapbooks (in big ledgers which his mother gave him after they had been filled up with figures from her grocery business) that held glossy magazine advertisements for 1930s and '40s films.

Not content with these mementos of happy movie experiences, he would make movies in his mind based on books he read, and cast them with stars of the day, like Montgomery Clift and Patricia Neal starring in *Reflections in a Golden Eye*. All of these movies appear in the scrapbooks, with hand-drawn illustrations, billed as "presented by Sir George Mansour."

Mansour showed me these scrapbooks one afternoon in November, 1999 as a prelude to talking about the changes in film exhibition he has witnessed. Asked how he got into the film exhibition business, Mansour replied, "Sometime around 1969 I stopped working for Warner Brothers and went to work as a booker for Esquire Theaters. I had been in distribution for about 7 or 8 years." Esquire owned a lot of different kinds of theaters, first run and repertory, as well as drive-ins and exploitation houses, including several that showed mostly sex movies.

"There was a number of first-run houses in Boston in those days," Mansour recalled, "but lots more neighborhood theaters and independent movie houses. New England was particularly noted for having so many 'mom and pop' movie houses. The one that Joe [Santamaria, Mansour's lover and partner for more than 40 years] and I bought and operated for awhile in Williamstown, [in western Massachusetts] was typical of that kind of theater."

Mansour remembered that "it held the auditorium for the theater, as well as two stores. Above the theater and the lobby was an apartment, which was intended for the owners. There was a door leading from the dining room into the booth. Whoever was living there was also the projectionist and everything else. The 'wife,' might be selling popcorn while the 'husband' was busy changing reels."

Theaters like the one in Williamstown "were mostly second run houses, but some of them were first run. The one in Williamstown was the only movie house in town. There were many, many more second run houses than repertory in those days. Today Dorchester has no movie house at all, but there were 5 back then. There were also houses in Roxbury and the Fenway, none of which are around any more. [Dorchester, Roxbury, and the Fenway are all neighborhoods of Boston.]

"There was the Fine Arts in the Fenway, an upstairs theater that was mostly repertory. There were also first run art houses, like the Exeter Street and the Orson Welles. The Harvard Square was one, but it changed to repertory, having a different double bill every day. We had a vibrant theater community. In those days, even the Cheri [which now mostly books big action movies] would play something like *Cries and Whispers*."

In 1947 a Supreme Court ruling had broken up the vertical monopolies which allowed major Hollywood studios to exert control in exhibition as well as production and distribution. But there were still echoes of that old system around in the 1960s. "Regular first run movie houses mostly belonged to chains," Mansour remembered. "MGM's films mostly played at Loew's movie houses, and Paramount mostly used ATM [American Theater Management] theaters, like the Music Hall in downtown Boston."

"And there were a lot more movies coming out then. Also, since we didn't have video in those days, lots of re-releases happened. Films lasted a lot longer, as far as being in circulation. But the prints were also better. I remember when I was working for Warner Brothers they had a room where old ladies with thick glasses would go over the prints after they came back from the-

aters and repair any damage they found. Nowadays a film runs for a couple of months and then they just throw it away."

Talking about the typically longer runs for films in those days, Mansour analyzed the differences between then and now. "The movies lasted longer, but they didn't necessarily play as long in one house as they can now. Since there were 5 or 6 titles coming along, all from the same company, the movies would move into the neighborhood houses much faster. They had what they called a 14-day and a 21-day release pattern."

"Basically, although it didn't always adhere exactly to that, the first tier of sub-run houses got their movies in two weeks after it opened in Boston, and the next tier would get it in three weeks. It was a little like an assembly line. Stuff just went right through, and it didn't matter how much it grossed. Some movie houses now sometimes keep a popular movie until it comes out on video, and that's why there are so few sub-run movie houses any more. They can't get the best titles."

Another change has happened in distribution patterns over the past three decades. "Most films didn't open wide in the 60s and early 70s, going to every city all at once. They would go to the first run movie houses in the big markets and then gradually go down the line. You didn't see a film playing in 9 or 12 different theaters in the same city when it first opened. Something like *End of Days* would have played at the Metropolitan, and that would be its only site in Boston, until it moved into the second-run houses. Of course those were huge movie palaces, but even so, films didn't play simultaneously in the suburbs, and there weren't any malls, outside the city. So if you wanted to see a first-run movie you had to come into the city."

Mansour still feels lucky to have been able to work in Boston. "Boston was a very important movie market then. A very few movies might only open at the Music Hall in New York City, and maybe in Grauman's Chinese in Los Angeles, and then gradually go out, but that was the exception. We also had some hard-ticket movies from time to time, where you had assigned seats. Something like *Bridge on the River Kwai* would play like that before it went into general release."

"But, generally speaking, films opened in Boston the same time they opened in New York and the other major cities, and all the big movie companies had distribution offices in Boston. There was a street in Bay Village where most of these companies had their offices - it was called Film Row - they had their offices, and screening rooms, and also shipping facilities, and that was when the films were inspected. They cleaned the prints, tried to make sure that they had the right running time, and see than nothing had been cut out of the film by some projectionist. And that was where critics came for press screenings."

Talking about the great variety of theaters and films he got to work with, Mansour described his Esquire days fondly. "At Esquire I booked over a hundred screens. We had straight porn and gay porn houses to book, we had exploitation theaters, we had drive-ins, art houses, first run commercial houses, sub-run houses. I would go in on Saturdays and Sundays, get the figures, sit around and wait for the owners to come in to go over the bookings. It was fun for me, definitely not a chore."

"The Esquire people were primarily exhibitors, but they also branched out a little bit into distribution. That took me to Europe a couple of times, where I bought films, already made, like *Mark of the Devil*, which we would then distribute to other exhibitors. And then we branched out even further and started to produce films, like *Last House on the Left*. That was a movie that was basically made because we had made a lot of money on a sex movie called *Together*, made by a young man in New Jersey named Sean Cunningham."

"He came up to Boston and showed us the film, which starred Marilyn Chambers. I thought it was exploitable, so I recommended it to my bosses. But instead of just showing the movie,

they bought the distribution rights, which was a little unusual then. They made a lot of money on it, and so did Cunningham, but he didn't do as well as Esquire did. So to pacify him they gave him some money to make a movie to be called *Sex Crime of the Century*. He became a producer and hired a director to film it, and the director was of course Wes Craven. So without me, there might not have been a *Scream* today."

Esquire also worked with Cunningham on his most successful series. "We were also involved in Cunningham's *Friday the 13th* series, having set up a distribution company named Hallmark Films after the success of *Last House...* I believe that after the first three *Friday the 13ths* we sold the title to Paramount. So every time they made a new movie in the series they would send Esquire a check."

This variety of theaters provided a fertile ground for the development of gay and lesbian filmmaking. "Some of the art theaters would also play some of the new gay movies that were coming out in the 1970s. Not porn, but maybe with a little soft core action. I booked the Garden Theater on Arlington Street, and we played some of Artie Bressan's films there. [Arthur Bressan, Jr. made several distinctive porn films in the 70s and 80s, including *Pleasure Beach* (1984), which helped him to fund the shooting of three non-porn features, including *Buddies* (1985), the first fiction film about AIDS.]

"We even had a benefit for that old newspaper, Gay Community News, there, with *A Very Natural Thing* [Christopher Larkin (1973), the first gay-themed film by a gay director to get commercial distribution in the U.S.A.]. We were able to raise \$1000 for them, which was quite a lot in those days. I remember talking with the manager of the theater at the time - he was the nephew of one of the owners and never wanted to work. So I called up after the benefit started running and said how did we do? He was very upset. He said 'we filled up - all *your* people are down here.'"

Mansour was also the first booker to commercially screen a film that has become one of the most beloved and notorious of the American independent movement. "*Pink Flamingos* was sent to me and I decided to play it in one of the gay porno houses, the South Station Cinema. So the first commercial run of the movie was in a gay porno house. John Waters was never very happy with that, and I can't blame him. Then we did play it in an art house, but only after it had played in New York and acquired a certain cachet."

Asked how he developed his independent booking business, Mansour recalled, "I had been at Esquire about 8 or 9 years, when I was approached by a couple of young men on Cape Cod who had an idea that they wanted to build a movie house where they would show old movies, and call it the Nickelodeon. I had been

Rosetta, 1999



recommended to them as someone who knew a lot about old movies, so they asked me if I would book it. My bosses at Esquire said it was OK for me to start booking this house on my own, using Esquire's facilities, but being paid separately by these people.

"The Nickelodeons started expanding, and even bought a theater over by Boston University that had been closed for two or three years, called the Abbey. That was their first big jump. The Abbey had initially been a very successful art house, independently owned by a group that's still around, but just as a real estate company now. The Nickelodeon people also bought theaters in Maynard [central Massachusetts] and Williamstown [which they eventually sold to Mansour and Santamaria], and opened new theaters in Portland, Maine, and Burlington, Vermont. So they were the nucleus of my little booking empire.

Asked how the owners of a small theater on Cape Cod could manage to acquire one of the more successful of Boston's art houses, Mansour spelled out a story of corporate mismanagement that provides a faint echo of what was to come in the Boston theater business in the 1970s and 80s. "Loew's wanted to have a base in Boston so they bought the Abbey from its original owners.

"But, unfortunately, they really didn't know how to run an art house after they bought it, so it went down the tubes. They closed it, and left it closed for about three years, even though they had a lease and were still paying rent. There were several people who wanted it, including Alan Freedburg of Sack Theaters [which hadn't yet been bought by Loew's]. But neither Sack nor Alan would put their name on the line personally, so the Nickelodeon people were able to move in, rename the theater, and make a success of it.

One of Mansour's fondest memories from his Nickelodeon booking days is his contribution to making *Repo Man* (Alex Cox, 1983) into a cult film. "Universal had opened it in Chicago, but it didn't do any business, so they decided to dump it. I had seen the film and loved it, so decided to try booking it into the Nickelodeon. Universal, being a major studio, did not ordinarily get its films booked into houses like this, so it took a little negotiation. By the time we had arranged for the run, the film had also gotten booked in New York City, and got great reviews. It ran at the Nickelodeon for a long time after all that.

"I had fun booking that theater," Mansour reminisces, "but it was a tremendous battle in those days. I had to fight the Sack chain, and the Exeter, and the Harvard Square theater, not to mention the Orson Welles. These were all independent entities that competed against each other for the best films. Eventually Loew's started buying up all these independent houses, which was ultimately bad for the movie business here, and bad for the distributors too."

This brought Mansour to the place where he began to think about the decline of movie and theater culture in Boston and the rest of the country. "We would bid on movies, and sometimes put up a great deal of money to get a particular movie. I remember that for Kurosawa's *Ran* we put up either \$75 or \$100 thousand, just for the rights to play it in Boston.

"A distributor could see a movie in a festival and figure that they could get money like that from Boston and San Francisco and a few other markets, so they could afford to buy the movie and bring it over. They could recoup their expenses just from those towns, and then go on from there. They can't do that any more, so this consolidation of ownership has really strangled the ability to distribute a lot of specialized movies. Particularly foreign language movies. But maybe that would have happened anyway. People can't seem to read anymore.

"Fewer foreign films are brought into the country because there aren't the same kinds of guarantees any more," Mansour reiterated with some force. "I don't think there's any place

where bidding happens any more. It's all negotiated. You form relationships with distributors and make deals. It isn't so much an open auction as it used to be. In many ways you're at a terrible disadvantage working as an independent booker in competition with all these theater chains, but this business is still one that has a kind of personal relationship basis. I've known some of these distributors for years, and they've known me, so it isn't as cut and dried as a lot of other businesses have become.

This decline in audience for foreign language films is one of Mansour's greatest sorrows when he looks back over his career. "A *Rosetta* for instance, will be OK for some of the houses I book, but it probably won't make its distributors any money. In the old days we could play something like Herzog's *Every Man for Himself* and make \$40,000 on its first run. And that's in the dollars of 15 or 20 years ago. Today it would be lucky to play for two days at the Museum of Fine Arts. We also didn't have the American independent films in those days, or the resurgence of British costume dramas, like we do now.

"But now even if we had a Fassbinder or a Godard making tremendously original, interesting, and commercially viable movies, they probably wouldn't be brought here any more because it's not commercially feasible. Kieslowski was maybe the last big art director, but you can't even compare his grosses to what a Fellini or a Truffaut would have done. But they are all gone. The only one we can hope for now is Almodore any*All About My Mother* is doing tremendous business, but on average only one foreign art movie really succeeds in any given year."

Trying to discern the shifting patterns of film exhibition from then to now, Mansour grew almost polemical. "So we started off the 70s with all different kinds of movie houses to show things in, and all different kinds of movies. I mean there's a lot of difference between a Truffaut and a Fassbinder. But now we have sort of a homogenization of art films. And this matches the homogenization of the theaters. Back then the Sack theaters were the biggest chain in Boston, then it became USA Cinema, then it was bought by Loew's, then it became Sony, and now we're back to Loew's again. Meanwhile they were buying up theaters all over the place, and closing many of them. And the repertory theaters started also being crunched by the video revolution.

"*Harold and Maude* and *King of Hearts* used to be brought back any number of times," Mansour remembered, "and people would always come to see them. It was guaranteed income. But when they could get them from a video store, or even own them, that was the end of a lot of the repertory theaters. And it also killed the sex houses too. There was a really vibrant sex house culture here in Boston, and we would compete over certain titles much the same way we did over art films.

"A new film by Radley Metzger would set off a lot of bidding, and some of these movies were even reviewed in the New York Times. Newspapers also accepted advertising for sex movies in those days. There were soft core houses and hard core. Radley Metzger mostly made soft core movies; when he wanted to do hard core he changed his name to Henry Parris. There were also recognizable actors who went back and forth. There was a guy named Casey Donovan in gay pornos who became Cal Culver when he would do straight pornos. And Long Johnny Holmes went back and forth without bothering to change his name."

The growing popularity of video in time manifested itself in film production. "When video came in, the sex filmmakers eventually switched over to shooting on video. At first they still shot on film and transferred, but soon enough they found out, just as the majors eventually did, how much more money there was in selling cassettes than in theatrical release. Certainly the porno business became more quickly aware than the mainstream, because they were smaller. So they started shooting pretty exclusively on video, and the theaters had to adopt video

projection systems, which don't look nearly as good as projected film. This helped to kill those houses."

Mansour's shift to independent booking overlapped this change in exhibition practices. "At that point, Esquire was having a lot of financial problems - they were always up and down. Always very generous but also very lax in paying their bills and such things. My paychecks started bouncing, and I was living on what I got from the Nickelodeon. Gradually I came to a point where I decided to quit working for Esquire, and I added some other movie houses, like the Avon in Providence, Rhode Island (which I still book) and struck out on my own in the early 70s."

"My independent business was so successful for awhile that I had an office and two or three employees. But that was while I still had the Nickelodeon, which was my best account. We were bidding successfully on first run films. Then when Alan Freedburg bought out the Nickelodeon, I went to work for him briefly, to keep the theater on track, but that relationship ended in a year or two when Loew's took over, because Loew's wasn't as interested in keeping the art house identity of the theater as Freedburg had been.

"Overall now," Mansour summed up, "there are fewer venues, fewer films, and fewer types of films, and that's a shame. But, fortunately, we do have places like Landmark [for which he works as a consultant] that have several screens and offer a comfortable environment, and can take a few chances with some of the riskier films. One of the things that have helped this, believe it or not, are gay non-porn movies. That is one of the last specified audiences, and these movies have taken the place of black exploitation and all the kinds of movies that certain selected audiences would always go and see. Strand Releasing, for instance, has built their whole distribution schedule around gay movies."

Thinking about the increase of multi-theater complexes, particularly in shopping malls, Mansour compared the potential to the actual practice. "The megaplex isn't a bad idea. In theory you would think they would make more movies more widely available to wider audiences. And it's true that things like *Being John Malkovich* will play in Randolph, or *Life Is Beautiful* will play in Danvers, [Randolph and Danvers are towns about 20 miles from Boston] and that would never have happened before. They do recognize that there is an audience out there, and they do have screens to fill.

"Unfortunately, what happens is that they devote 3 screens to *Pokemon*, 2 screens to the latest Bond film, and 2 screens to *Sleepy Hollow*. So they aren't actually providing greater variety, they're just burning up successful films faster. In a way though, this has helped the smaller movie houses. Because these large complexes need so many prints in the beginning, there are more prints available two or three weeks later for what used to be the sub-run houses."

Mansour believes that one force counteracting the general trend towards homogenization of the types of movies now offered to audiences is the film festival. "Everybody has a festival now. In New England we have them in Northampton, and Fall River, and Newport, and Provincetown and Providence. Some of them are fine. There is a wide range of quality. Some of them just take whatever movies are available and throw them on a screen and call it a festival.

"But others have a more specific personality. Telluride, in Colorado, is one of the best, one of my favorites. I've been going there for 25 years now. Northampton [in western Massachusetts] is one of the better ones locally. It focuses on American independents and only last 4 days. They show lots of locally produced films, and the town really supports this kind of thing."

Besides helping to book the Northampton festival, Mansour has had other specific festival experience. "I started the Boston

Gay and Lesbian Film Festival 17 years ago, and that was a lot of fun. We realized that there were more movies about the gay experience that were beyond just porn, and it was also a very easy audience to tap into. Very committed to going to movies, and very aware and knowledgeable.

"Partly because of festivals like this, there is now a tremendous amount of gay and lesbian films being made, and a lot for the new art theater multiplexes to choose from. What Brigitte Bardot used to be to art houses in the 50s and 60s - you could always count on good houses for things like *And God Created Woman* - now the gay movie is for the multiplexes. It doesn't always work, but you can usually count on two or three good weeks from one of these movies in the art houses."

Mansour distinguished between these festival run mostly for film consumers and modeled on the New York Film Festival, and those like Cannes and Berlin and Toronto that are more geared to distributors and exhibitors. "Obviously Sundance was the big start of the American independent film becoming widespread. The majors got interested after the success of *Sex, Lies, and Videotape*. Just this past year *Blair Witch Project* made Harrison Ford and all these other people look like dummies.

"But American independent films don't always succeed. Some of the majors see these small companies picking up movies for peanuts and making a lot of money and try to get into the act. So, for instance, Columbia put up \$10 million for *The Spitfire Grill* with Ellen Burstyn and took a bath. It was a disaster. Things that seem exciting at festivals aren't always so exciting in a commercial theater. At festivals," Mansour explained, "there are long lines, and things are crowded, and cell phones are going off all over the place - it's a frenzy."

Summing up, Mansour talked about the present state of specialized film exhibition. "There has been more of a skewing towards independent and foreign English language movies. Not to mention the *Masterpiece Theatre* kind of thing. The most difficult kinds of movies now are the *Rosettas* and such. Many of the bookers have never seen '*Rosetta*,' and don't even know it exists. Films like that are very hard to get off the ground.

"And there are lots of them that we never even have a shot at. It took years for films like *Lovers on the Bridge* or *Underground* to come here. Those are films that there would have been a bidding war for in the old days, and now they can't even get screen time at the Harvard Film Archive."

One trend in film distribution still looming on the horizon has Mansour intrigued. "I do think the way film is delivered to theaters has to change pretty soon. To think that we are still schlepping film around in 50 pound metal containers - it's pretty stupid. It's the same technology that we were using in the 1930s. The idea that films can be digitally beamed into theaters is very interesting.

"And presumably we will have higher quality images without the projection jams and tape breakage that plague us now. It's amazing how old fashioned, and low tech the movie biz has remained. Even with all this Surround Sound and stadium seating and everything, they still lug cans of film up to the booth. There can't be too many other industries that are still working in basically the same way they were in, say, 1920.

"Maybe bookers like me will have huge computer screens in our offices," Mansour dreamed, "and will be able to call up a movie to check it out whenever we want. And we'll get out of the house even less. Over the past few years more and more small distributors just send me videos instead of setting up exhibitors' screenings, so who knows? Why not have high resolution, wall sized screens at home?"

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Darkness and Light

by Shelly Kraicer

The most demanding and the most rewarding Chinese language film at the 1999 Toronto International Film Festival was Chang Tso-chi's *Darkness and Light* [*Heian zhi guang*]. Like fellow Taiwanese director Hou Hsiao-hsien, Chang makes films that impose a speed (slow) and a rhythm (subtle, insistent, measured) on their viewers. His 1995 film *Ah Chung* [*Zhong zi*] made rather radical demands on its audience: its vague, dreamlike discontinuities and abrupt transitions made it a rather formidable, prickly text to come to terms with. But *Darkness and Light* is entirely different.

It sports a well-behaved linear narrative, for the most part. Seventeen year-old college student Kang-yi returns from Taipei to her home in Keelung, Taiwan's northern port, for the summer. Some time ago, a car accident had killed her mother and blinded her father. The latter now runs a massage parlour out of his home, where several other blind employees, Kang-yi's grandfather, and her mildly retarded brother live. Kang-yi notices Ping, a young man who has just moved into her building. While Ping is introduced to the petty criminal underworld of his father's friend Big Brother, Kang-yi develops a crush on Ping, and they spend a night out on the town. In consequence, they become indirectly embroiled in a gang dispute, and Ping is killed. Kang-yi's father, meanwhile, falls ill. After Kang-yi takes him on a final trip to Taipei, she watches him die. As she sees a fireworks shower from her bedroom window, she thinks of Ping's and her father's return.

This plot, though, isn't quite at the centre of Chang Tso-chi's film. It is merely a scaffold on which to hang a densely and intricately detailed picture album of family life. Chang lovingly photographs, often in very long takes, what seem like routine domestic rituals:



setting tables, serving dinner, taking in laundry. But his camera — and especially his microphone — are obsessed with capturing the ways the family connects during these domestic moments. There is an almost constant bickering, chattering soundtrack that catches not really tensions and disputes, but rather the ebb and flow of disagreements, friction, concession, and humour. You can almost feel the texture of the process through which people renegotiate the links that together allow them to construct their own family. The relationship between Kang-yi and her brother Kee, in particular, is beautifully drawn, and a joy to witness. He complains, denounces her, defends her, proclaims her love to Ping on her behalf, all in a half-nagging, half-cajoling bleat of a voice. Though nominally mentally retarded, he may be more than the film's "wise fool"; he is the character with its purest moral centre.

Darkness and Light does not just explore the emotional space among the family's members. Like a Hou film, it is also obsessed with the physical space that they inhabit. By means of repeated, identifiable fixed camera positions within various rooms and long tracking shots through hallways, the film gives us an almost tangible picture of the apartment's layout, the feel of the connecting spaces. We feel exactly how those spaces are isolated from the world outside, and

how they might also be connected.

The film's title points up one layer of symbolism that plays out at a fairly obvious level: the contrast between vision and blindness. The film starts and ends in total darkness: like the blind characters with whom Kang-yi lives, we are, at first, forced to encounter a space exclusively through its sounds. Darkness itself plays a continuous syntactic role through the film: each scene ends with a fade to black (a technique that has become remarkably prominent, recently, in films such as Hou Hsiao-hsien's *Flowers of Shanghai* [*Hai shang hua*, 1998] and Olivier Assayas' *Fin août, début septembre* [1998]). Kang-yi bridges the worlds of darkness and of light, and is limited to neither. She is sensitive to the way the smells and sounds of a dank pedestrian passage can sooth her father with youthful memories. As a guide between the two worlds, she leads him and his masseurs outside on a memorable excursion to a local restaurant. Her vision of fireworks near the film's end even heralds an apotheosis of sorts, celebrated with pure light.

But there are more subtle symbolic systems at work here, too. Every time a scene shows Kang-yi in her room, it also shows Keelung harbour through her window. Shots outside the apartment repeatedly return to the harbour, to boats coming and going. These boats

passing through the harbour are *Darkness and Light's* central symbol, and evoke its primary drama. It is the drama of confinement and freedom, of whether or not one is trapped in a small, insulated, self-contained world, or whether one can negotiate a passage through, to the outside, to some sense of freedom or at least of the possibility of movement. Ping, Kang-yi's doomed boyfriend, is trapped in stasis: he is shown, three times, batting stones into the grey, forbidding ocean (the boats behind him are fixed, unreachable, going nowhere). Three characters: Kang-yi, Kee, and Ah Xiu (her father) take a "voyage" outside the apartment, each time troubling the domestic equilibrium within. But *Darkness and Light* has a wonderful ambivalence about this tension at its root: it cherishes and celebrates this enclosed domestic space as much as it pushes against it.

Only Kang-yi fully succeeds in crossing into the "outside". But transitions for her, though they are possible, are also clearly underlined as complex, constructed events. The film marks each of her passages with a flurry of editing disruptions (her blissful jump from a boat into the harbour, shot simultaneously from three directions; her first kiss, again, sliced up into multiple shots separated by fades; and her final epiphany, isolated by an unusually long fade to black). Each transition has its cost, takes its toll on her. Nothing is given, and certainly nothing is easy about any of Kang-yi's crossings.

Chang Tso-chi takes up the project that Hou Hsiao-hsien has been developing over the past fifteen years, of filming a narrative of space. Hou set the pattern for a certain kind of Taiwanese cinema: one that analyses the syntax holding together a lived-in space, and that inscribes this space with meaning through the interactions of its inhabitants. This, of course, resonates with Taiwan's own topological predicament: how people (or several peoples) live in a shared, limited space, and how to define that space against the larger world. What is surprising, perhaps, is the grace and optimism with which *Darkness and Light* proposes a response to the kind of tyranny that space itself seeks to impose.

postscript: Although largely overlooked in Toronto's increasingly commodified and hype-obsessed festival climate, *Darkness and Light* triumphed in November 1999 at the 12th annual Tokyo International Film Festival, winning three major awards: the Tokyo

Grand Prix (best film in competition), the non-official Asian Film Award (best Asian film), and the Tokyo Gold Prize (10 million yen for the director).

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One Piece: On Kore-eda, Kitano and some lighter moments in Contemporary Japanese Cinema

by Susan Morrison

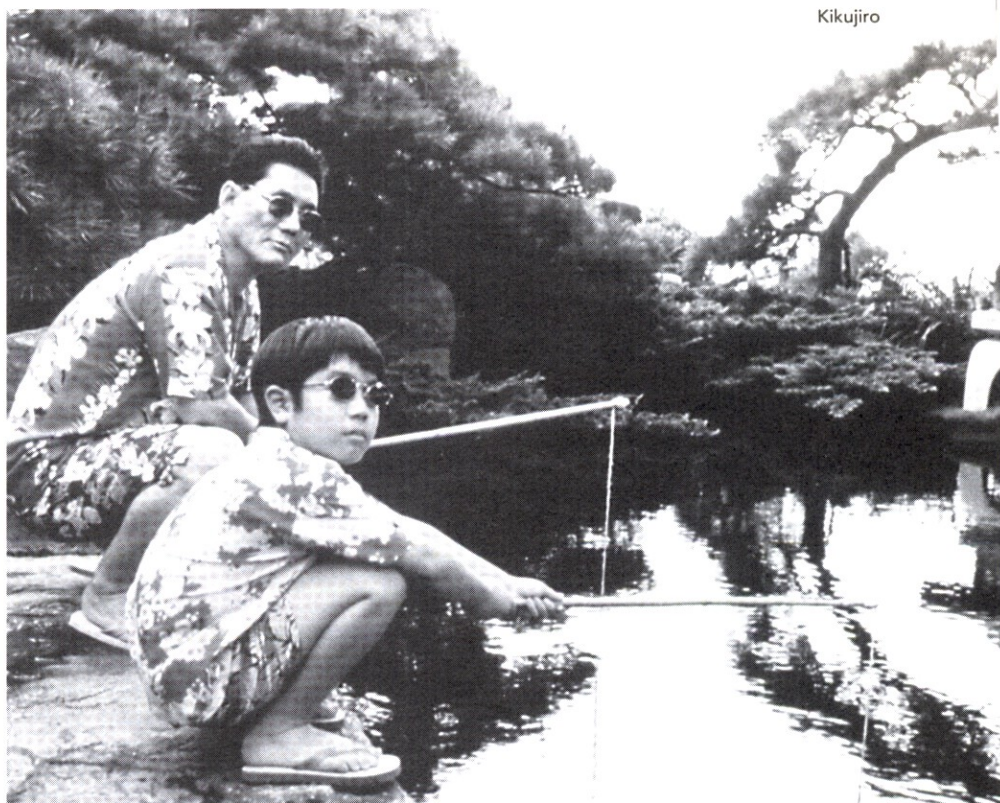
As an ardent filmviewer, I am constantly made aware during the rest of the year of how lucky we are in Toronto to have the opportunity to see films deemed non-commercial by the distribution industry. Although it means a very intense 10 days in September, during which all else gets put on hold—certainly a difficult but not

surmountable problem for me, given that my "day job" as a high school teacher kicks in at precisely the same time as the festival's brief run—the "sacrifice" is well worth it.

Last year, the Toronto Film Festival's spotlight on contemporary Japanese cinema opened up a whole new world of film to me. In fact, the single film that most impressed me at the 1998 festival was *After Life*, by Hirokazu Kore-eda, a film whose premise sounded somewhat contrived in terms of its requirements for the suspension of disbelief. However, in spite of this, it proved to be one of the most remarkable and powerful films that I have seen. *After Life* takes place at a way station for people who have just died. Here, they are interviewed by "caseworkers" who help them to select a single memory from their past life that they will relive forever in their afterlife, with the understanding that all else will be stricken from their minds. These memories are then recreated as accurately as possible with stage sets and actors, and videotaped. At the end of the week's stay at the way station, there is a final screening of these films; as their film-memories are projected, the people pass on to their afterlife.

In preparation for the film, Kore-eda interviewed hundreds of elderly Japanese, asking them to perform the same task set

Kikujiro



the characters in his film: that is, to recount the one memory they would choose to relive for eternity. He then wrote the script drawing on these chosen moments. The first part of the film contains a series of brief scenes, each consisting of a closeup of a seated person facing the viewer-as-interviewer and speaking directly to us about their memories of the past. For these, Kore-eda used a combination of actors working from scripts, actors recounting their own experiences, and real people telling true stories.

The film's narrative has its protagonist, Mochizuki, a case worker who appears to be in his early 20s. He is given the task of assisting Watanabe, a 70 year old man unable to find the one memory that stands out from the rest of his very ordinary and uneventful life. As the film unfolds, it becomes evident to Mochizuki that the two men's lives are in fact entwined; we learn that the younger man was Watanabe's wife's first love who had been killed during the second world war. This revelation leads Mochizuki to find at last the one memory that he wants to relive in perpetuity, and so he, too, leaves at the end of the week.

However, *After Life* is much more than just the story of the connection between Mochizuki and Watanabe. Kore-eda's concern is in investigating the construction and meaning of memory in and to an individual's life. His previous films reflected this interest: *Maborosi* (1995), his first fiction film, dealt poignantly with a young woman's attempt to come to terms with the inexplicable death of her husband and her memories of their life together; *Without Memory* (1996), was a documentary film that followed a man suffering from medically-induced short term memory loss and the impact it had on his family and friends as he tried to get assistance. Kore-eda comments in the accompanying notes to *After Life* that when he was 6, his grandfather became senile. He remarks, "As a child, I comprehended little of what I saw, but I remember thinking that people forgot everything when they died. I now understand how critical memories are to our sense of identity, a sense of self." In *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes talked about the ways in which photography serves to capture memories of life that is past, the most poignant images being ones which represent life after death; i.e. freeze the memory of the now-dead for the still-living. In *After Life*, Kore-eda reflects in a powerful way on the connection between filmic image and memory, between filmic image-as-memory.

Educated in the classics of Japanese cinema, I had not much experience with recent Japanese film prior to last year's festival spotlight save for the films of Takeshi Kitano which I've managed to see (mostly on video) in the last few years. Drawn to them by the yakuza subject matter, a holdover from my John Woo/Hong Kong gangster films interest, I have been caught up in an attraction/repulsion syndrome by the filmmaker/standup comic who writes, directs and stars in films that are characteristically very violent, idiosyncratically humorous and deadpan to-the-point-of-anomie; *Sonatine* (1993) and *Hana-bi/Fireworks* (1997) are his two most well-known films. This year's *Kikujiro* was somewhat of a surprise. It's a film that follows a nine year old boy, Masao, who, lonely and with no-one to play with, decides to spend his summer vacation tracking down the mother who had abandoned him at birth. A neighbour takes pity on his haplessness and orders her good-for-nothing bragaddocio small-time yakuza husband (played by Kitano) to help the boy in his search. While the plot is more or less predictable in terms of the relationship between the sweet kid and the gruff gangster, there is enough else built into this one to raise it above the conventional. The film's narrative is both introduced and structured visually and thematically by the device of chronological pages from Masao's "What-I-Did-Last-Summer Project". Especially interesting I felt was the way in which Kitano used the device of interjecting artifice into the "reality" of the film. There are several occasions where through fantasy or dream the film's space becomes self-consciously stage-like, the characters from the plot become actors in full stage makeup and costume (e.g. a pathetic child molester becomes a dancing devil-like creature) and there appear to be references to a whole history of characters/actors in Japanese culture.

Accompanying *Kikujiro* to the festival this year was *Jam Session*, a documentary by Makoto Shinozaki on the making of Kitano's film. However, this is a film strictly for Kitano fans. In it, Kitano is practically idolized; the camera lingers lovingly on every quirk and grimace, every joke and bit of playfulness shown by the director. A brief interview between Kitano and the great Taiwanese director, Hou Hsiao-hsien takes place in a commissary and interestingly enough turns on questions directed to Kitano by the unassuming Hou, rather than the other way around.

While this was an exceptional year for

good films at the Toronto Film Festival, the one that most intrigued me is an oddball kind of film. *One Piece*, by Shinobu Yaguchi and Takuji Suzuki, is in effect a compilation of very short videos made separately by the 2 directors which are linked together by structural and formal constraints set out at the beginning of the film as follows:

"Home video-no zoom, pan, editing or post-sound—one scene, one cut—super-duper small size films!"

Apparently one-upping the Dogme 95 crew in "rigorousness" and "authenticity" of project, *One Piece* is in reality about as far from the pretentiousness and self-importance inherent in the Dogme 95 productions as possible. In the post-screening conversation between directors and audience, Yaguchi and Suzuki explained that they conceived of the project as a break from the tensions, restrictions and costs of professional filmmaking; the choice of video over film, no editing, no camerawork, one shot per "film", the use of whatever friends and/or actors who were available at the time and improvised storyline rather than script enabled them to do the films quickly enough. When asked about the terms of production, they stated that they were shot "after hours" on weekends, the average video taking 7 takes to get right; and that on the whole they made roughly 2 a day. In all, Yaguchi and Suzuki have made some 31 of these short pieces; the version shown in Toronto consisted of 14 of them. When asked how they had decided on which to include, they claimed that they were given a timeframe of 70 minutes by the Film festival, and edited accordingly. Each tape has its own narrative that is complete unto itself.

Many of the pieces deal with relationships in a very wry way. A couple sit in an apartment and seriously belittle a female acquaintance who the audience knows is hiding behind a curtain in the same room. 3 young women make a "singing" video to give to a school friend of theirs who is getting married. While they are rehearsing and shooting the tape, their true feelings about her come out; her arrival on camera only aggravates matters. A man sitting in his apartment is visited by a woman who tells him that she is in fact, his cat who, having bumped into his girlfriend outside, has temporarily taken over the girl friend's body. She proceeds to tell him all those complaints she's been storing up



Beau Travail

over the years; such as the fact that she wishes he wouldn't buy such cheap cat food, etc. A young man sits looking out an apartment window in a position of sheer and utter boredom. Suddenly, a very large pink lace brassière falls from above and catches on the balcony ledge. His attempts to take advantage of the erotic charge of the situation are foiled by the arrival of his girlfriend.

One Piece is a very clever bit of filmmaking, short enough not to cloy; long enough to indicate the variety possible within the rigid structural constraints set by the filmmakers. Yaguchi and Suzuki envisaged the possibility of working with other directors collaboratively to produce more of these pieces. In a period of filmmaking where effects have taken over story as the end of film, it is very refreshing to come across a film which forces the directors to focus on story, as there's not much else they allow themselves to maintain interest.

Claire Denis and masculinity: *Beau Travail*

by Richard Lippe

Claire Denis's *Beau Travail* is visually dazzling and, thematically, a fascinating meditation on masculinity and gender identity. The film is a reworking of Herman Melville's "Billy Budd, Sailor", a connection that is reinforced by the use of extracts from Benjamin Britten's opera "Billy Budd" on the soundtrack. Melville's novella provisionally provides the film with its basic premise and offers marginally recognizable versions of Billy Budd and Claggart, respectively, Gilles Sentain/Gregoire Colin and Galoup/Denis Lavant. Yet, Denis's film isn't the sombre

work these sources might suggest. Instead, *Beau Travail* is a vibrant and sensual experience that focuses on male physical beauty and sexual desire. In fact, it would be a mistake to assume that the film is intended to duplicate the emotional/dramatic or intellectual experience of its above-mentioned sources. In the film's press release, Denis, who co-scripted the film with Jean-Pol Fargeau, says "Two poems of Herman Melville inspired me first for this work:"

Gold in the Mountain

Gold in the mountain,
And gold in the glen,
And greed in the heart,
Heaven having no part,
And unsatisfied men.

The Night March

With banners furled, and clarions mute,
An army passes in the night,
And beaming spears and helms salute,
The dark with bright.

In silence deep the legions stream,
With open ranks, in order true;
Over boundless plains they stream and
gleam,
No Chief in view!

These two poems give Denis a milieu and set the tone for her film. *Beau Travail* takes place in Africa, the action primarily occurs in the gulf of Djibouti area, and its characters belong to the contemporary French Foreign Legion. The story is told in flashback by ex-sergeant Galoup who is now living in Marseille, having been recently dishonorably discharged from the Legion. Galoup, middle-aged, small and not particularly striking, provides voice-over narration as he records his thoughts in a diary. Denis fluidly cuts back and forth between the past and present. Galoup tells his story in a direct, matter-of-fact manner: his immediate dislike of a new recruit, Gilles Sentain, who quickly caught the eye of the Commander, Bruno Forestier/Michel Subor, causing Galoup eventually to take desperate measures to "save" the Commander from the young man. The Commander, whose most notable characteristic is a masculine insolence, is somewhat older than Galoup although he is introduced by the former through a photograph which was taken many years ago. In the portrait, Forestier appears as an extremely handsome, hunky young man who could be mistaken for an early 1950s Marlon Brando. In addition to the photograph, Galoup possesses secretly a wrist bracelet which has been engraved "Bruno". Of the attention the Commander directs towards Sentain, Galoup bluntly says "I was jealous." Yet, Galoup, like the Commander in his encounters with Sentain, never acknowledges that a sexual attraction is at issue.

Beau Travail's credits are seen against a backdrop of 19th century paintings which depict heroic images of legionnaires in battle, while the soundtrack features inspirational-like military music. Denis cuts from these signifiers of the French Foreign Legion's past to a close shot of a young black woman, played by Marta Tafesse Kassa, sensually moving to the beat of a contemporary piece of dance music. The juxtaposition is abrupt and disorientating given the expectations the credit sequence sets up. But it quickly becomes evident that *Beau Travail* isn't a conventional adventure film. The viewer later discovers that the dancing African woman is Galoup's girlfriend; but, as the scene continues, we are shown a number of random shot of legionnaires dancing

with other black women. The significance of the film's credit sequence and opening images seems to be the establishing of a division between the masculine world of the military and the feminine world, a space characterized by theatre/music, sensuality and pleasure.

The legionnaires, as seen on the dance floor, aren't presented as eroticized figures; but, soon after, in the daylight and out of doors, the men, doing their exercises and maneuvers, are photographed so that they appear as beautiful bodies in motion. In fact, these handsome, graceful young men, led by Galoup who participates in the action, perform as if they are dancers—Denis heightens the aesthetic dimension of the images with the use of choral background music. These stylized images disrupt the realist context the on-location shooting produces. Galoup and his men are also 'feminized' in other ways. A tracking shot of a clothes line hung with men's underwear leads to surrealistic-like images of the recruits diligently ironing their clothing as Galoup and the Commander approvingly watch. And, later, the men are seen sitting down to a dinner which turns out to be a birthday celebration. Galoup concerns himself with the proper setting of the silverware and, when the cake arrives, there is a discussion regarding the decorative icing on the cake. In addition to these "domestic" scenes, there are images such as the young men together relaxing and swimming or the job, doing road repairs. The men behave consistently in an unself-conscious manner, with an ease and harmony in their interaction; Sentain becomes a hero, rescuing a man when a helicopter crashes.

Denis never suggests that these men might perceive themselves or their actions as other than masculine or question their heterosexual identity. On the other hand, the images she offers carry a strong homoerotic charge. The men's beauty exists in magnificent natural surroundings—nature itself intensifies the aesthetic experience. Denis creates an environment that is both sensual and spiritual. It is this idyllic world that Galoup remembers although, when shown living among the men, he keeps his distance. Galoup, with his obsession with the Commander (and Sentain), seems to live in a world of his own. (It is suggested, through performance and mise-en-scene, that Galoup, in engaging Sentain in bodily combat, has a suppressed desire for the recruit himself.) His most intimate gesture is to buy a bottle of perfume for his girlfriend and place it

next to her as she sleeps. The precise nature of their relationship isn't defined; they are never shown engaged directly in physical contact. In the present day scenes, he is seen living in isolation. His barren living quarters, including the backyard where he is seen washing his clothes, suggest confinement.

Galoup attempts to rid himself permanently of Sentain by sending him off alone into the desert with a faulty compass but a dehydrated, unconscious Sentain is found by a caravan. The plan fails and, from his perspective, leads to his banishment. Yet early on in the film, Galoup says in passing that he, like the Commander, is aging and sooner or later will have to give up his present existence. And Denis makes it clear that the Commander's attitude towards Galoup is shaped primarily by their professional relations; at most, Galoup functions as an ideal employee catering to the Commander's needs. Galoup, on the other hand, has channeled his sexual attraction into a romantic fascination with the Commander and his identity.

Denis Lavant's Galoup isn't a viewer identification figure despite the intimacy his voiceover narration produces and the fact that he is the film's central protagonist. Although the Commander and Sentain exist outside of Galoup's vision, their primary function is to serve his story. Sentain is the catalyst that triggers Galoup's unconscious fears regarding aging and loss. Yet, significantly, Galoup, despite the murderous designs he directs towards Sentain, is ultimately an appealing and sympathetic character. Galoup is a naïf. (When Galoup deposits Sentain at the edge of the desert and sends him off, Sentain says "Say 'Hi' to the Commander when you get back", suggesting that he isn't totally unaware of Galoup's motives). In Galoup's final interaction with the Commander, the latter treats the dismissal in a perfunctory manner, ignoring any personal response. While Galoup himself has lived by a masculinist code, he seems incapable of fully understanding what the ethos entails—he has become, by indirectly acting on his erotic and romantic desires which have prompted him to perform the 'heroic' act of protecting the Commander, its victim.

Beau Travail's Marseille scenes take place over the course of a day. As the flashbacks recount Galoup's story in chronological order, the film's tone darkens. Given Galoup's isolation in the present day, there seems to be a suggestion that the reminiscences are leading to despair and, possibly, death. The notion

is reinforced with a shot of Galoup lying on his bed pressing a gun to his body; in close up; a chest tattoo is visible and it reads "to serve and die for a good cause". But the image, in fact, is difficult to contextualize given the privileging of Galoup's subjectivity and the fluid cutting between the time frames. And the present day shots also depict Galoup dressing up to go out, travelling through the city, going into a bar and ordering a drink. In comparison to the flashbacks, the images seem to be insignificant; but, on the contrary, these images lead to the film's conclusion. *Beau Travail*, unexpectedly, ends where it began—on a dance floor. The film juxtaposes the image of Galoup contemplating his death with a shot that features him alone on a neon-lit dance floor. The space he inhabits, which is lined with mirrors reflecting his image, suggests a stage. Galoup, wearing the stylish clothes he was seen earlier putting on, strikes a number of swaggering poses. The poses are equally graceful and heightened images of masculine prowess. Moving with the music, Corona's "The Rhythm of the Night", Galoup suddenly breaks into a fantastically exuberant dance performance. Using his agile body and stamina in a manner not seen before in the film, Galoup transforms himself into a sensual, homoerotic presence. (The sequence calls Denis Lavant's performance into relief. In hindsight, Lavant's discipline and concentration become apparent. His burst of creative/sexual energy in the dance number is breathtaking.) The film's concluding sequence initially seems to be baffling; but it functions as an audacious and exhilarating coda to the film's concerns regarding the socially constructed forces that lead to repression and sublimation. Galoup, in the film's concluding images, may not be a fully liberated sexual person—as presented, the sequence can be read as Galoup's fantasy. Still, his survival and assertion of himself on the dance floor, whether imagined or actual, elevates the spirit.

Beau Travail is photographed beautifully by Agnes Godard who has worked with Claire Denis since 1989. Godard uses light delicately in the African footage to create an atmosphere that suggests a primal, unspoiled environment. Her images of the young men are carefully lit to highlight their physicality. The film illustrates, as have recently a number of women still photographers, that gay men aren't alone in responding to the male

body as an object of sensuality and desire. In *Beau Travail* these male images aren't merely iconic; the images are crucial to Denis's concerns with gender, sexuality and self-definition. *Beau Travail* bears comparison to Josef von Sternberg's *Morocco* (1930). The two films both take as a point of departure the mythic image of the French Foreign Legion with its connotations of the exotic, the sensual and 'manly'; the expectations the concept promises are challenged on numerous levels and, particularly, through an emphasis on aesthetics. Denis, like Sternberg, is a bold, imaginative artist. In *Beau Travail* dialogue exchanges are secondary to image and sound/music as the film's predominant means of communication. Image and sound are, in effect, choreographed; on the other hand, the film doesn't privilege the 'artistic' over narrative, characterization and the socio-political.

Clare Denis received critical recognition with her first film, *Chocolat* (1989) and her subsequent work has consistently garnered acclaim. Yet, *Chocolat* is the only Denis film available on video and, as far as I know, nothing since has been shown theatrically in Canada. (The situation in the States is much the same.) Denis is perhaps the cinema's most talented working female filmmaker. I hope that *Beau Travail* will soon get a theatrical release in NYC, which might, in turn, lead to a broader distribution. It is one of the best films of the 1990s.

Splendor

by Robin Wood

Where is Gregg Araki going? *Nowhere* gave us one obvious answer, in its very title: after the passion and rage (above all political) of *The Doom Generation*, the completely hermetic world defined by the final film of the so-called 'teen trilogy' came as a shock. *Nowhere* presented a world peopled by caricatures with nothing to live or fight for but the next fix, the next orgasm, hence no context within which such a world might be placed and criticized, a wider world that might be held responsible for this insulated world's existence and for the hopeless-

ness of its denizens. Araki seemed, in fact, completely complicit with the world presented: there was nothing else, so...whatever. *Nowhere* at least could be construed as a logical (if saddening) sequel to *The Doom Generation's* pessimism: protest, the film seemed to say, was no longer relevant, the condition of civilization having been diagnosed in its predecessor (with frightening conviction) as hopeless. But that, unfortunately, is not a position conducive to creativity: how can an artist be creative if he no longer has anything to be creative about? Hence the overall impression left by *Nowhere* of a kind of self-indulgent doodling.

Splendor is something else again, but ultimately another type of evasion, or abnegation of responsibility: the creative responsibility of the artist who gave us that self-proclaimed "irresponsible movie" *The Living End*, or that most desperate of "Desperate Pictures" (the name of Araki's production company) *The Doom Generation*, with its passionate anger and equally passionate life-affirmation in the face of despair. There is a certain irony in that the film (culminating as it does in childbirth and the construction of a "new" family) is clearly offered as life-affirmative. But the affirmation, such as it is, is thoroughly simplistic, its necessary condition being regression to a model that, unless radically transformed, has neither relevance nor resonance in today's social context.

The film belongs to a recent group of attempts to rethink late 30s screwball comedy in contemporary terms: examples would include (in descending order of distinction) *My Best Friend's Wedding*, *Flirting with Disaster* and *There's Something About Mary*, but the most apposite here (as well as the best) is clearly *The Daytrippers*, which starts from a typical screwball comedy premise and proceeds to darken it (the action moving from early morning to middle-of-the-night within a single day) until there is not only no screwball but no comedy left, its theme being the dissolution of both marriage and the traditional family. Whereas *Nowhere* was too complicated (without being in the least complex), *Splendor* is altogether too simple: it merely takes over the formulae of late 30s/40s screwball comedy without doing anything very interesting or innovative with them. Replace the leads with Cary Grant, Irene Dunne and Ralph Bellamy, and what is the difference?—merely that the Grant character is now *two* men. Aside from that, and the fact that the heroine's side-

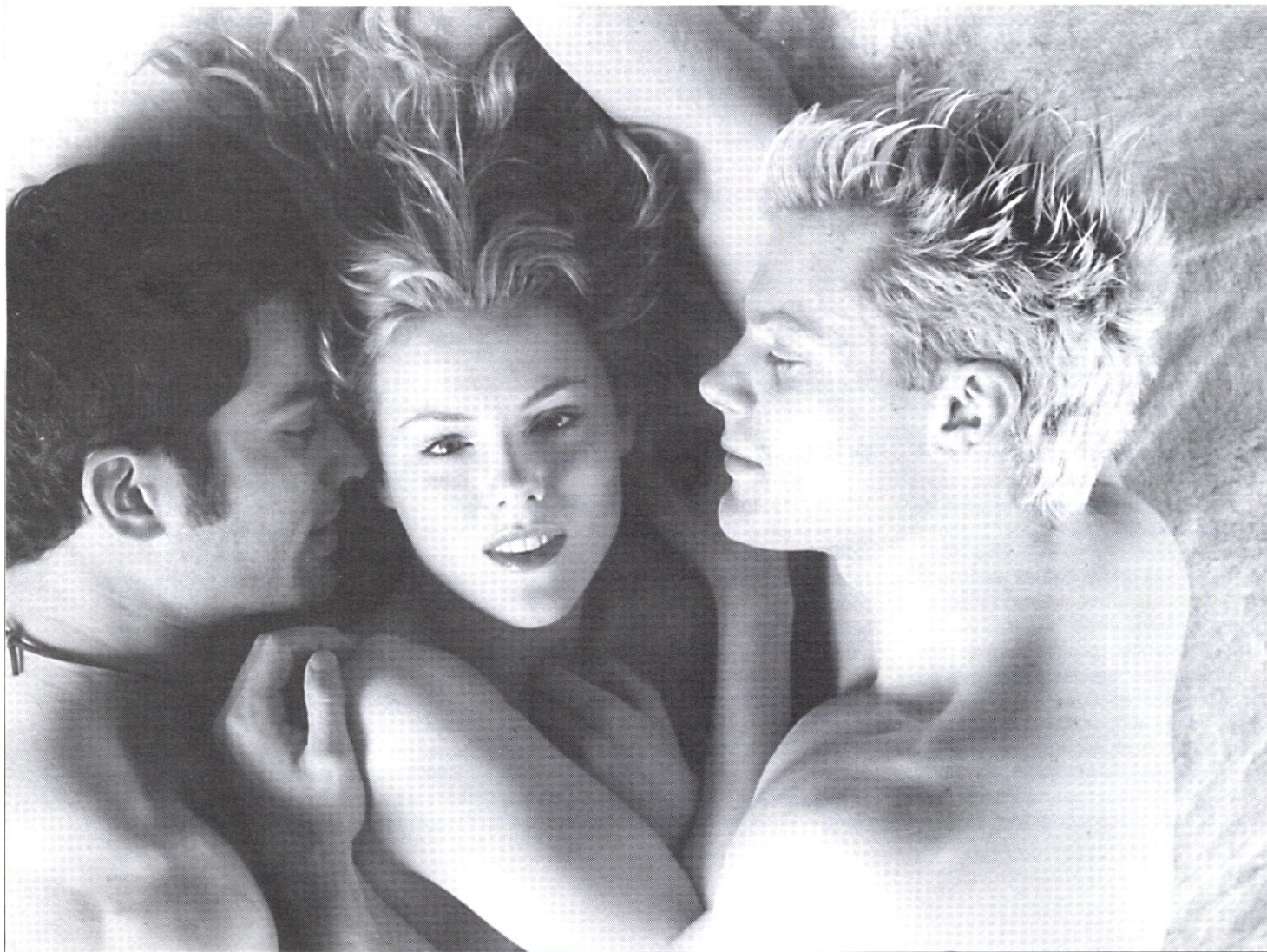
kick (what one thinks of as the Joan Blondell character) is now explicitly a lesbian, what have you got but the same old formulae, struggling for breath long after their real lifespan ended? In fact, the last third is taken up with the most dubious of the classical formulae (already resurrected for *The Graduate*) wherein the heroine, rather than being allowed to make up her own mind, is "rescued" at the very altar by the two men (with the enthusiastic encouragement of the sidekick, another in the parade of Araki's noisily aggressive, stereotypical, grotesquely caricatured lesbians (see *The Living End* and *The Doom Generation*). Viewed both within their historical context and for their relevance today, the great classic screwballs (for example, *Bringing Up Baby*, *The Awful Truth*, *The Lady Eve*, the original version of *Two-Faced Woman*, to which one might add, at a lower level of distinction, *Theodora Goes Wild* and *Too Many Husbands*) are still as liberating and invigorating as ever, their central concern being the empower-

ment of women. As the first two of these appear to be Araki's particular favourites, it seems a pity he hasn't learned more from them. *Splendor* begins promisingly, with the heroine taking charge and organizing the two men into a *menage a trois* that satisfies her needs, but for the remainder of the film she becomes increasingly passive and conventional, her "choices" determined by her commitment to motherhood and the need for a secure bourgeois marriage.

There is a great opportunity missed, quite willfully. The film sets up, in its early scenes, the possibility of a three-way sexual relationship (the heroine manipulating the two men into kissing each other, an experience that one enjoys and the other accepts) and then (while never explicitly denying it) proceeds to chicken out in the most abject way, the "tease" way: the spectator can, just about, if s/he wants, assume that the men continue some kind of sexual relationship, but the dominant signifiers combine to suggest that they don't. I suppose the

idea of two men willingly and openly sharing one woman may still have a certain shock value for some, but the film does little to extend conventional notions of human sexuality. It does even less than that for women. At least the Cary Grant of *Holiday* or *The Awful Truth* related (by the end) to Hepburn or Dunne as an equal partner. *Splendor*, on the other hand, seems curiously obsessive about motherhood. Not only does its heroine produce the babies of one or other (or both?) of the men: the men themselves remain essentially childish, so that she ends up with *four* kids to look after, and we are offered this as some kind of liberating resolution. The film makes a token gesture toward suggesting that the men have "grown up" (they now have jobs, so can function more or less as breadwinners), but this is perfunctory in the extreme. The theme of the irresponsible male learning responsibility in the interests of fatherhood is treated far more intelligently and convincingly in *Big Daddy*, which also allows its heroine a

Splendor





L'humanité

critical intelligence and freedom of choice, and is far more progressive in its treatment of homosexuality.

Some will find this account of *Splendor* too harsh. It is, after all, quite an enjoyable film if one watches it indulgently, basically good-natured if somewhat silly. Had I seen the film without knowing the director's name, that is probably how I would have received it. But to leave it at that would be to insult the Gregg Araki who made *The Living End* and *The Doom Generation*: he has established himself as a filmmaker who must be taken seriously.

L'humanité

by Robin Wood

(Warning: I cannot write about this film without revealing the ending, which ideally should come as a surprise. Readers are advised to see the film before reading on).

Readers will be surprised to find me defending David Cronenberg, my extreme dislike of his films being by now notorious. However, the defence

concerns, not his work, but the press-produced scandal arising out of the jury awards at the 1999 Cannes film festival. The Dardenne Brothers' *Rosetta* won the Palme d'Or and the shared best actress award; Bruno Dumont's *L'humanité* was unprecedentedly given three awards: the Grand Prix (the 'runner up' to the Palme d'Or), best actor, and equal best actress (with Emilie Duquenne, the extraordinary star of *Rosetta*). The jury's decisions proved not merely totally unexpected but extremely unpopular; Cronenberg, as head of the jury, was accused of dominating and bullying the

other members in their choices, on what evidence is not clear. My personal acquaintance with Cronenberg has been limited: we met a couple of times in the early 80s, coming together in our shared hostility to censorship, in the campaign to end it in Ontario. I found him gentle, quiet, somewhat reticent, a very pleasant person (and he already knew that I hated his films). Admittedly that was a long time ago, and he may have changed. But I can't imagine the person I met 'bullying' anyone. And what does this say for the other, variously distinguished, jurors, who were apparently too feeble to stand up for their views?

Bullying or not, however, in my opinion the awards need no apology. I might perhaps have reversed them, but I cannot imagine there being two more obviously deserving films in competition. *Rosetta* is very fine, a worthy successor to the Dardenne Brothers' splendid debut film *La Promesse*; *L'humanité* is a masterpiece. Reports have it that members of the press laughed at the film during the press screening and booed at the end. Given the general bankruptcy of the capitalist press, one could hardly expect anything different. *L'humanité* is a very demanding work, not only in its length and the very slow, deliberate pacing, but in its subject matter, from the implications of which one might well wish to shield oneself (and what better defence than ridicule?).

What is Dumont's film about? It is about what the title announces, 'humanity' in the fullest sense of the word, the difficulty of allowing oneself to be fully human, of exposing oneself to the pain and horror of human life, an experience most of us are reluctant to accept but which is available to us every morning when we open our daily newspaper. The film is about Somalia, Kosovo, East Timor—or about homelessness and the men and women who die among us in the streets every winter, about battered, raped and murdered women, about school massacres. It is about one's helplessness, one's complicity, one's despair. It is also about the cost of despair.

The film takes as its starting-point (in fact, shortly after its opening shots) the naked body of a young woman who has been sexually abused, tortured and murdered. Some have objected to Dumont's forcing us to see the bloody, brutalized vagina in closeup, but it is essential to his purpose that we share the policeman's trauma as intimately as a film can make us. Dumont's previous

film (among the most remarkable first features in cinema) was called *La Vie de Jésus*—somewhat puzzlingly, as its central character bears no recognizable resemblance to the historical/mythic figure of the New Testament. The title would, in fact, be more appropriate to *L'humanité*, its policeman protagonist, Pharaon de Winter, becoming a kind of Christ-figure manque. His experience of ultimate horror (not only the horror of the woman's death and suffering, but the horror that another human being was responsible for it) results both in his compassion for his fellow humans and in a readiness to take their sins on his own shoulders: his subsequent actions express his acknowledgment that he himself, as a human sharing in all human potential, could do the appalling things others do.

This seems the place to set right a somewhat grotesque misreading that appears to be in circulation: that Pharaon himself is revealed at the end as the killer (he is seated in the police station alone, handcuffed) and that the whole film has therefore been his (self-exculpatory) dream. Such a reading reduces the film to nonsense and can be interpreted only as a desperate defence against its implications. Dumont, certainly, wishes us to consider the possibility that Pharaon could be the killer (he is shown in the long-held opening shot running from the scene of the crime), but not in any simplistic literal sense. The final image follows the scene in which he confronts the actual killer (his best friend Joseph), and instead of repudiating him and any possible connection between them by beating or denouncing him (as we might expect), embraces and kisses him as they weep together. His handcuffing of himself must be read, therefore, as his expression of their common humanity.

Is the film, therefore, a meditation on Original Sin? Perhaps. Dumont is clearly deeply involved in Christian mythology and ideology, and one can read from the film a sense of fundamental and possibly incorrigible evil in human existence. This seems to me, however, strongly qualified by the film's political dimension: its position is clearly leftist, both in social and sexual politics, the two indeed coming together in the figure of the film's leading female character Domino, who is both Joseph's lover and a prominent figure in a worker's protest strike, and arguably the most positive character. For, Christ-like as Pharaon may be in certain respects, his

exposure of himself to the full horror of human existence leads to despair and, inevitably, impotence, an inability to act. This is emphasized in a number of key scenes:

1. The restaurant sequence, where Pharaon, Joseph and Domino go for dinner. The women diners are being insulted and harassed by a group of mindless jocks (having a bit of fun on 'boys' night out') inventing obscene sexist songs on the women's names; it is the generally insensitive and macho Joseph who intervenes; Pharaon sits helpless.

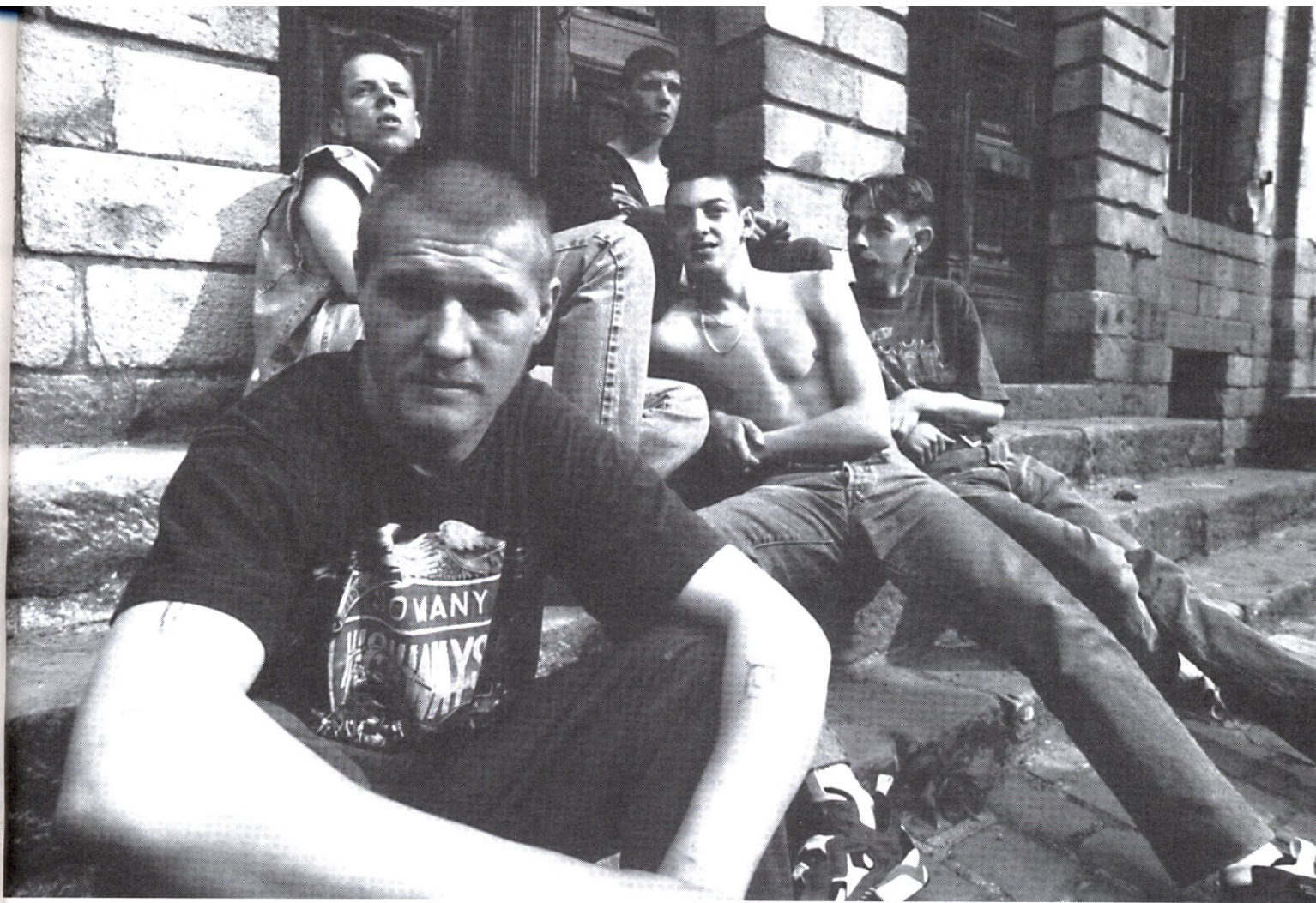
2. This is answered by the sequence of the guided tour. Joseph is now the harasser (with somewhat more justification—he is working class, the tourists are complacent bourgeois—but they are mostly elderly women, and do they deserve this?), while Pharaon stands smiling vaguely, troubled but quite incapable of protest.

3. Pharaon has been quite unable to tell Domino that he loves her (though everyone has guessed this); when she at last offers herself to him he is incapable of accepting. (Again, the issue is far from clearcut: he is refusing partly out of sensitivity, knowing that she is not in love with him). He would, at least, have been a more considerate lover than Joseph, whose display of 'masculine' sexual prowess is brutal in the extreme.

4. He takes the 'wrong' side in the strike (despite Domino's very vocal presence among the strikers) because as a policeman it is his 'duty'.

5. The handcuffs of the final scene can be read as acceptance of 'original sin', but can equally be read as the ultimate image of his impotence.

The film's style creates a context within which its theme can be viewed with relative calm. If someone had told me what *L'humanité* was about, I would have expected a work of extreme, in-your-face emotionalism. Dumont gives us the precise opposite: everything is leisurely, distanced, with long takes and frequent long-held static camera shots (such as the opening), every image beautifully and deliberately composed, the shot sometimes held after the action of the scene has been completed. We are invited to contemplate, not react hysterically. This of course adds immeasurably to the film's power—though possibly also to its tendency to alienate audiences, conditioned as we are today to expect (and accept?) every form of cinematic aggression, both visual and auditory.



L'Humanité

A Humanist Philosophy: Interview(s) with Bruno Dumont

by Mark Peranson and
Andréa Picard

While the recent passing of Robert Bresson may be the final death knell for first hundred years of film, it does not usher in the end of a poetics of cinema. Bruno Dumont has created—in just two works, *La vie de Jésus* (1997) and *L'humanité* (1999)—a non-cerebral, anti-bourgeois cinema which aspires to a purity of expression through an intellectually rigorous aesthetic, rooted in the physicality of the actors and the Flemish landscape. The following interviews were

done before and during the 1999 Toronto International Film Festival; Andréa Picard spoke to Dumont over the phone from his home in Balleuil, while Mark Peranson followed up with a face-to-face meeting. The interviews are mutually supportive, at times covering different ground, other times overlapping. Some replies have been consolidated from both interviews. In this way, we present a far-ranging look at a confident filmmaker who should prove to be one of the more important film artists in the decade to come.

Film and Art

MARK PERANSON: Simply, *L'humanité* is a film that deals with basic ideas. So my first question is simple: Why do you make films?

BRUNO DUMONT: That's a very simple and a very difficult question. There is a desire expressed through cinema and its methods to search and to find what's inside of others. I would like to express my own views on the mysteries of life.

MP: Degas has said that art is false, and

one can only approach the truth through falsity. Do you think that the cinema, because it is a false medium, is best able in art to capture something like the truth?

BD: Yes, I think that all art is false. And that with art in general—talking about life in false ways—can you attain truth. Because the truth can only be expressed through lies and falseness. And those who film truth directly, in your face like seen on television, tell us nothing. Thus the work of the artist is to reveal the truth through his work. When Picasso and Braque invented Cubism, the representation was false in comparison to reality; but it was the reality of truth that they were expressing. An artist must modify reality. It is only through modification that the truth can be expressed. That's what Degas meant when he said that art was false.

MP: But why do you choose cinema in particular?

BD: I could have easily used painting or literature to express myself, but I think that cinema itself has the capacity to



express what is invisible—and this interests me. And, also, cinema is an art of time, of the temporal. Within the perception of existence, time is the most important material of life. Therefore, cinema has a natural capacity to talk about life.

MP: How much does it also have to do with movement as opposed to time?

BD: The movement inside of the frame, the length of the take is the art of organization, everything is time. When I shoot a take from beginning to end, this is time. The actor who moves; this is time. Therefore, all of cinema is time. The art of *mise-en-scène* is organizing time. The time of the actor, the time of the action, the time of waiting.

MP: You've said that very few filmmakers make real cinema. What's your definition of real cinema?

BD: It's understanding that what cinema is—is its methods, its artistry, its possibilities. It's not like all art. It's understanding what art can be and do. It's fundamentally a way of expressing oneself. It's expressing what lies deep within our heart. At the same time, there is a lot of mystery—even in the films that I make. I think the cinema is about mystery. Most of all a spiritual mystery. That's the most secretive, enigmatic, and foreign. Art is made up of the spiritual.

Filmmaking Philosophy

ANDRÉA PICARD: The title also implies themes which are universal, and yet your film deals with themes which are profoundly fundamental in a specific, regional way.

BD: I believe that the universal is reached

and understood by what is the particular. It is therefore by telling very specific and ordinary stories that we can understand the universal. One cannot film the universal, thus one must tell stories, ordinary and simple stories in order to talk about what is universal.

AP: What value do you accord the audience's response?

BD: The viewer has a very important role to play in the films that I make. That's why I don't complete them: the viewer has a determining role in the reception of the film. In general, there are a lot of filmmakers who give us overcooked (or burnt) hamburgers, if you know what I mean. What I hope for the most is that the film enriches the viewer. That a modification of one's being occurs, whether one or two, or three days later. That's what matters.

MP: Do you consider *L'humanité* to be a demanding film?

BD: I think, I hope that it is a true work of cinema. Difficult or not, it doesn't matter. It's like in painting, there are blue ones, red ones, green ones. It's up to the viewer.

AP: Your films are very rigorous and raw, very corporeal. For some, that's considered vulgar. What do you consider vulgarity to be? Is it an absence of beauty?

BD: I don't think what I do is vulgar. Rawness is a way to bring the viewer closer to primary matter, to emotions and relationships with others, to what really exists. The cinema has the potential to be regenerative because through it we are ultimately able to find what is essential. Rawness also allows us to think anew.

What I want is for the viewer to rethink liberally the reality which he faces.

AP: Can you discuss the *choc physique* [physical shock] that you attempt to achieve in your films?

BD: I think that physicality is the beginning of the spirit/mind. What comes first is the body so I keep to this. After we can talk about it, think about it. I need to have actors who are essentially physical. Words don't interest me. I think that someone who speaks is simply expressing what his body feels, and in cinema we can simply keep to bodies. So I essentially film bodies which bleed and sweat, which look. Without having the need of characters who think. Viewers can think for themselves.

MP: Are you religious?

BD: I believe in the sacred. I believe in spirituality but not in religion, not in institutions, not in transcendence. I don't believe in transcendence, rather in immanence.

Practical Aspects of Filmmaking

AP: Why do you set your films in the country and not the city?

BD: I believe that the city is too sophisticated, in a negative sense. There are too many fallacies in the city. The country brings us nearer to what is sacred because it is nature, it's the simplicity of the landscape, whereas the city is closest to culture. I situate my films in the country because I am most interested in nature, and thus in the universal. The landscape is fundamental. My characters speak very little because the landscape is preponderant within the comprehension of the emotions. I try to work like an artist, which means to photograph landscapes which are ways of expressing the emotions of my characters. And that when one says that a landscape is beautiful, it's within ourselves that something is occurring, rather than outside. The worst nerve-endings of culture are to be found in the city. Most cities are ugly. They're just anything—there's no grace. You might have some nice furniture next to some hideous furniture. That's what's difficult, finding harmony. I begin in the country but I could very well make films in the city. But they'd be much more complex films.

AP: Why do you use non-professional actors?

BD: I have a need to have actors before me, to feel them, to hear them. It's my sensibility which makes me need those people and not professional actors who need to be filled up, to be completed, to be modified. I don't shoot in studios, I

shoot trees with real trees, houses with real houses, and therefore I shoot real people. It's the same thing.

MP: Why did you choose Emmanuel Schotte to play Pharaon?

BD: I saw many actors when I did the screen tests. I saw the strength he had in his voice and in his look. I knew I had found what I was looking for: humanity incarnate, or just about.

AP: So would you say you choose your actors because of their physical appearance?

BD: Mostly, yes. But there are some individuals who inspire me and some who don't. It's like in life when we meet someone. It's exactly the same thing, except I'm looking for characters. Thus I look for faces, for beings who are susceptible. I spend a lot of time in stores, in the streets, on the sidewalks, watching people. From time to time, I stop them.

MP: What kind of directions did you give him—physical movements, emotions he was supposed to be feeling?

BD: Sometimes I gave him very precise directions, telling him how to move and where, how to move his hands, his head. I frame my actors exactly—and at the same time I let them liberate themselves within that frame, and within the script more generally.

MP: Was there a lot of rehearsal on the film?

BD: The actors do not know the exact scene. On average we rehearse one or two times, but just prior to shooting. We never rehearse the entire film. I talk to them about the film in general, but they only discover the scene the morning of the shoot. I rehearse the actors in the scene just to see how they move, then I shoot. One or two takes at the most. On *L'humanité*

MP: How did you come up with the story for *L'humanité*?

BD: I am always looking for the simplest, most ordinary things. The stories are made up of things I read in the newspapers and things like that. The stories themselves, however, are not very important.

AP: In *L'humanité* you make use of the genre policier to explore philosophical notions. What importance does the narrative carry for you? Why did you choose to make a *policier*?

BD: I am always searching for simple ways of expressing myself effectively to evoke questions which are profound. The police officer is a detective, and a detective is a man who searches for the truth in his own way. And this is a nice expression of the search for truth. So I prefer to

film a police inspector to a philosopher. I think that a philosopher is too complex, whereas the policeman does exactly the same thing—plays exactly the same role. The *policier* is very interesting because it is based on a search. Someone is looking for something. Every *policier* story is about the struggle between good and evil; it's more primitive than intellectual. The movement of the film, the dynamic of the film is the search for the killer. That's why it goes on, it's a search.

MP: How do you decide on the film's length? He could have kept searching for the killer for a longer period of time, no?

BD: Certainly, the search for the killer could have lasted a longer period of time, not shorter. When one searches, whether it is for a cure for AIDS or another illness or disease, the search is lengthy. Every search is a lengthy one. The more complex it is, the longer it takes. Searching always takes time.

MP: How much can we say that the search is generalized for something more than the killer. Is Pharaon searching for something else? What?

BD: I think searching for the killer is looking for oneself. I am convinced of that. I think the killer is within us. I think that is the work Pharaon is doing. It's like chasing a wild animal all day long. The search is being done within while walking, inside the person who's chasing the beast.

MP: How much do you think that Pharaon's humanity gets in the way of his doing his job? How does it obstruct his search?

BD: I think that Pharaon is someone who consists of humanity. And humanity is at the center of the film. He is too human, in the Nietzschean way. He brings out everything that is inside of us. Thus he naturally modifies his way of acting with others and within the world by his excessive humanity. This functions like a magnifying glass for the spectators, as the viewer looks at himself. Pharaon is a magnifying glass.

AP: What is his sacrifice?

BD: His sacrifice is feeling for others too much. He takes others in his arms, he fuses with them, he embraces them. That's humanity. It's the capacity to feel others so much that we fuse with them. That's why he can't stop touching those who are around him, he wants to fuse with them.

AP: But he doesn't touch his mother.

BD: No, because his mother is a being who is purely his mother. He has no desire for her, but he could have. I wrote a scene that I didn't shoot which had

sexual connotations between the two of them, but I guess I didn't dare. She's distant and she doesn't share his sensibility. He is hyper-sensitive; he has a hyper-sensitivity which she doesn't have.

MP: Would you consider your film to be a return to neorealist or a "realist" aesthetic? For the most part people are not used to slowly-paced films and seeing ordinary looking people on screen.

BD: I don't think my film is "realist" at all. There is an appearance of reality, but all the situations are completely extraordinary. There are many extraordinary situations. There are many little details. We are not in reality. In the performances of the actors, in their ways of speaking, everything is false. So I think that there are plenty of fantastical elements, surreal elements—to interject. There is a strong appearance of reality because of the actors, because of the locations where I shoot, but it's all an appearance. That's why I search for simple, basic stories, like the *policier*, of things that are very real, but I ultimately dissect them. I make more of a fantastical-realist cinema than naturalist. The ordinary reality that we see addresses other things which are more spiritual, more sacred and that the sacred is attained by the ordinary. And through the burlesque, as well, because the burlesque borders what is serious, and that several moments in the film we find ourselves bordering the burlesque and we are also near tragedy. Tragedy quickly becomes burlesque. In certain situations, notably during the police investigation, tragedy is both burlesque and absurd. And the film attempts to express these and offer them to the viewer.

AP: Your characters seem to bear a sort of spiritual imprisonment, an individual alienation which attests to a pessimistic human condition. But at the same time there are true moments of tenderness, like the friendship between Domino and Pharaon.

BD: I do think that there is a considerable fatalism in the films that I make. All of the protagonists are subjected to a destiny which cannot be altered. In my film there are moments which are extremely violent, very raw. I need purity in order to talk about tenderness. It's like light and darkness. I like oppositions. There is an eternal tenderness between Domino and Pharaon and we feel even more that there is a violence which underlies this tenderness.

AP: One of the most touching moments was when Domino was hurt when Pharaon humiliated her in front of her

co-workers during the strike. It was there that I realized that like in *La vie de Jésus*, *L'humanité* illustrates the human struggle to remain dignified.

BD: Yes, that's one of the rare moments where Pharaon is able to act with authority and this is an important point in the story because it allows for Domino's reaction.

AP: Pharaon de Winter is a real person, a painter, but you invent a lineage between him and Pharaon, the cop. Why make this link?

BD: It's this filiation which interests me the most. It lends a sensibility—whether it figures in the art or the commissariat. What matters is what's in the heart of a man whether he is an artist, a baker, a pastry chef, or a cop, it doesn't matter. In the end what matters is what's in his heart. I didn't want Pharaon to be an artist. Quite the opposite. He's the grandson of an artist. He's someone who doesn't care about art. I didn't want someone who was too sensitive to art. I think he is much too primitive for that, too simple. With the artist, we have this intellectual connotation which bothers me, so that's why I created this filiation between grandfather and grandson who is a cop and doesn't care about painting. But he nevertheless has an extraordinary sensibility and that's what matters most.

AP: Once the painting is gone, does he miss it?

BD: It's a trace. It's a lack made upon the wall. I think he's conscious of the painting, but not as a painting. He's seen this image before his bed so many times, and really sees it only once it goes. It's like people who only once they've gone we realize just to what extent their presence matters. That's the form of absence. That's why one must leave. We must leave those we love so that they think of us and love us. It's similar with the painting. I feel very strongly about this. One must leave, one must move.

AP: And we must touch.

BD: Yes, most importantly, we must touch. We must touch because we live so much by the television, the Internet—these are moments when we no longer touch. Touch is a fundamental lack today. Everything is so cerebral.

The State of Filmmaking

AP: How do you situate *L'humanité* and *La vie de Jésus* within the framework of contemporary French cinema?

BD: I think that they are fundamentally poetic films. I believe that they are films which are very demanding for the viewers, and at the same time are probably

the most respectful of the viewers.

AP: Your affinity for certain filmmakers like Bresson, Rossellini, Pasolini is rather evident. It's a sort of poetic filmmaking, as you've said. Can we also say it's based on a certain precision?

BD: Yes. I think that Rossellini, Pasolini and Bresson are also poets of the cinema. They are individuals who have understood or have attempted to understand the expressive capabilities of the cinema. In art, in other words, in the attempt to modify the glance of a viewer who stands before a canvas and looks; it's like saying what is an artist. It's someone who tried to talk about the truth, but through his respective language, which is painting. I'm a filmmaker, I try to make films which have a certain faith in what is cultural, philosophical, poetic, artistic. I believe that films are extremely important. They're crucial to existence. I think that cinema provided us with the means to face our own existence. It's not just a moment of distraction—the opposite, in fact.

MP: In particular, it seems that *L'humanité* is a very Bressonian film, what do you take from Bresson and what do you leave out?

BD: For me, Bresson is someone whom I admire greatly, but at the same time, he is someone whom I discovered late in my career. He is not among the group of filmmakers who has influenced me as a filmmaker. I think I share with him the notion of an "artistic cinema." Yet at the same time, he has a cinema which is much more bourgeois. He's more aristocratic in his themes, in his characters. He works with models and post-synchs almost all of his voices, which allows him to rework the images and the characters. I always use live sound. Thus, there is a sophistication in Bresson's films which is not present in mine. Many other directors have influenced me. I think the important filmmakers for me were those who I saw in my 20s, when I was a student. Kubrick, Buñuel, Resnais, Fellini, Bergman, that era.

AP: In the press notes for Cannes, you say, "Art is war." Can you elaborate on that?

BD: It's a struggle. I am not a complacent artist. Therefore I do things which are sometimes difficult, not well-received. That is what war is. It's using forced methods, at times violent, but which are for me, necessary means. I'm not a complacent artist or a commercial artist who mocks the viewer. This means I like to struggle with the viewer; I'm not afraid of the viewer. I really like confrontation. That's war.

AP: But it's also about the struggle within oneself, confrontation within the self.

BD: Yes. I think that ultimately that's all it can be. I think that every war is an interior fight. We struggle against ourselves. The viewer is ultimately by himself. I think that the artistic experience is a frightening one. Art is something so powerful.

MP: What was your immediate reaction when you were on stage? When the response was hostile?

BD: On the one hand, I was extremely happy that the film and its actors were being recognized, and at the same time I felt the film was abused by certain parts of the press and certain critics. The film has its supporters and its enemies. I think that's normal. I did find that there were many idiotic things said about the film. I prefer someone who categorically dislikes the film, and explains his point his view. That's his freedom to do so, rather than insulting the actors.

MP: Have you spoken to Mr.

Cronenberg? What did he say to you?

BD: He simply told me that he was completely wrapped up in the actors, that when he saw the film he saw something that touched him that he had never seen before. He was moved by it. That's the reason he decided to reward the actors, it's as simple as that.

MP: I have heard that your next film is going to be shot in America. Why?

BD: Because America interests me. The Americans interest me. It's another world. It's a world which has a strong hold and a great influence on the rest of the world, and as a filmmaker I cannot sit back and watch this happen without wanting to impose my own view. The dominance of American filmmaking also interests me, and I don't have the intention to be compromised within certain parameters—but I do have the desire to change cinematic genres in terms of distribution, of subjects, of money, or production. Therefore, I want to make an American film.

MP: With American professional actors?

BD: Yes. The film is currently being written and I think it will be completed by the beginning of the year 2000. It will be a very demanding film, production-wise. It will deal with all the mythologies which surround American filmmaking.

MP: How do you plan to do this if you don't speak English fluently?

BD: I will learn.

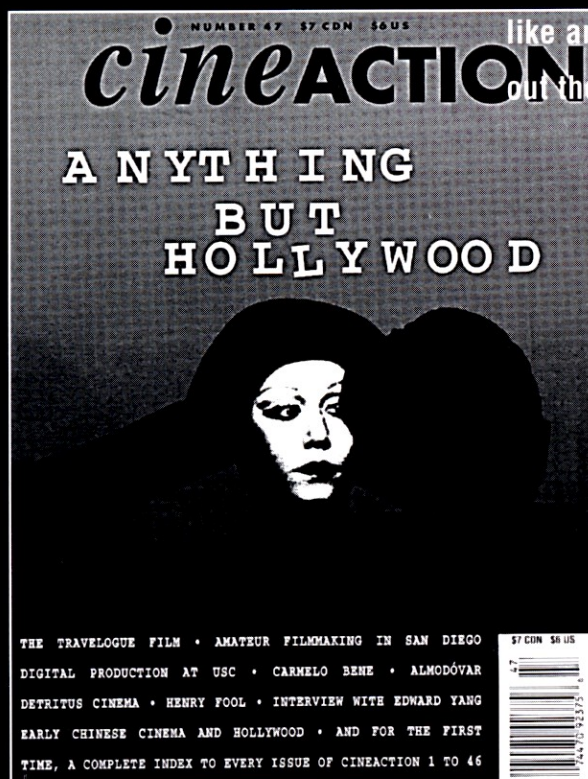
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